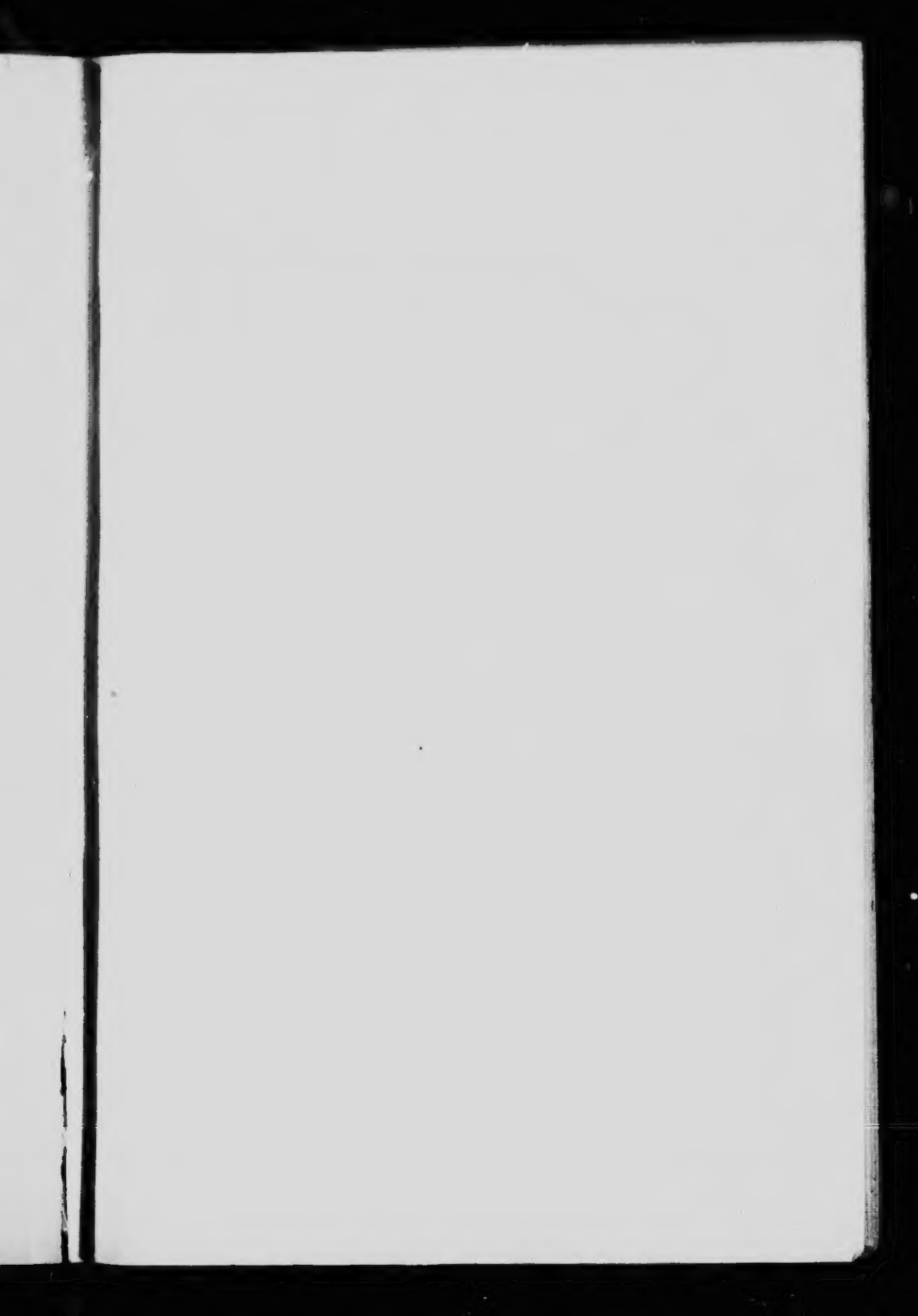


FACES IN THE MIST





"I HAVE BROUGHT YOU . . INTO ONE OF THE MOST DANGEROUS
SPOTS IN ALL THESE HILLS."

FACES IN THE MIST

A Romance of Reality

BY

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"A SON OF GAD," ETC.

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CONTENTS

BOOK I

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. LOST !	7
II. A DESPERATE FLIGHT	17
III. AN ACT OF PROVIDENCE	26
IV. "MOTHER, I HAVE KILLED A MAN!"	34
V. MY LORD BENBRECK : CALLUM'S PRAYER	46
VI. BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH	55
VII. THE CAIRN DHU CRAGS AGAIN	67
VIII. HERO WORSHIP	74
IX. THE TRIUMPH OF YOUTH	80
X. A VISION OF SPLENDOUR	87
XI. HEREDITARY ENEMIES	97
XII. HOME TRUTHS AND A QUARREL	103
XIII. NEWS FOR KENNETH	110
XIV. CAREW AS PEACEMAKER	120
XV. TROUBLES THICKEN	123
XVI. ENLIGHTENMENT	132
XVII. A BITTER REVENGE	139
XVIII. TOO LATE	147

BOOK II

I. A STARTLING DISCOVERY	155
II. "WITH ALL LIABILITIES"	162
III. MONTE CARLO AND BANKRUPTCY	168

Contents

CHAPTER	PAGE
IV. THE SPHINX	175
V. A FACE IN THE THRONG	182
VI. FURTHER DISCOVERIES	187
VII. BENBRECK'S OPPORTUNITY	195
VIII. A PROPOSAL	203
IX. MR. FAIRHURST'S NEW DEAL	210
X. GRACIOUS BUT COY	218
XI. CAREW'S JEOPARDY	224
XII. CHISHOLM BEY	230
XIII. WAR IN THE CAMP	239
XIV. MRS. FAIRHURST DISTRACTED	251
XV. ARCADIAN OF THE DESERT	264
XVI. ABDULLAH AND THE HUNDRED SPEARS	274
XVII. BENBRECK'S STRATEGY AND WHAT CAME OF IT	280
XVIII. ON THE TRACK OF THE BRIGANDS	288
XIX. THE MESSAGE ON THE SPEAR	296
XX. THE CONFERENCE	304
XXI. A DIPLOMATIC ENCOUNTER	312
XXII. WOLVES AND PANTHERS	319
XXIII. HOW THE TRYST WAS KEPT	327
XXIV. PAMELA'S VALOUR	335
XXV. FLIGHT AND CONFESSION	342
XXVI. BENBRECK'S WELCOME	349
XXVII. YET ANOTHER FLIGHT	355

BOOK III

I. WHAT PAMELA OVERHEARD	367
II. PAMELA'S DECISION	374
III. ANOTHER THUNDERBOLT	383
IV. THE GREAT TRIUMPH	390
V. HAIL, AND FAREWELL!	397

FACES IN THE MIST

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

LOST !

KENNETH lay in the shade of a pine, absorbing the perfume of half a continent of empurpled heather. All round him the silent hills drowsed, their flanks glowing, their blackest rock-ribs lustrous in the brilliant summer light. Far above their highest peak, aloft in the dome of heaven, his roving eye caught the gleam of wings—a brace of eagles, mates as he judged, journeying northward. He watched them with the lazy interest of one whose whole being is relaxed in luxurious ease, whose very bones are soaked in indolence. As they soared on, he turned first his head and shoulders, and then his whole body, to watch their serene progress.

Then his eye caught the gleam of something else, a white speck like a shaken-out handkerchief far off on the shoulder of a ben, an advance guard of mist, paused there as it were to spy upon the vast sunlit expanse below. He did not expect mist on that golden afternoon. Its presence seemed an impertinence, an incongruous intrusion on the glory of a perfect day ; one of the rare days on which heaven and earth and air are in exquisite harmony. But it was a mere wisp, and would presently vanish.

Faces in the Mist

Again he raised his eyes to the eagles holding their high, proud way straight into the limpid bosom of the north. It seemed a superbly good thing to be an eagle winging a free course as fancy or pleasure might prompt. How did the world appear to them viewed from their altitude, and what did they think of the crawling race of men? Ah, that one had wings to try such a flight!

He lay more squarely, his elbows deep in the fragrant heather, his chin in the hollow of his joined hands. Stretched thus, he gazed till the eagles became as wrens and finally melted—the process was literally one of melting—into the liquid blue beyond the remotest peak. When at last they were gone, he felt an odd little twinge of loneliness. Though far off and disdaining him, they helped to occupy the void, imparted some faint sense of fellowship. Now he was absolutely alone. Within earshot, within eyeshot, there did not seem to be a living thing; he had the whole wide, somnolent landscape to himself.

All at once he sat up, vibrating with a new interest. The mist had stolen forward, invaded the whole ben, and was sweeping downward in a direct course towards him. It was still miles away; but as a mountaineer he knew that the swiftest horseman lags in comparison with a hill mist bent on racing. For a minute he faced it, wondering whether he must surrender his delicious couch of heather. To the returned exile, retasting joys of which he had so often and so ardently dreamed among torrid wastes, it seemed preposterous that he should be driven off by a casual mist. As he debated, the wind, which had been a fondling breeze, suddenly became chill and damp.

"Beyond doubt, it's coming this way," he told himself, picking up his mackintosh and getting to his feet. "And it's coming quickly, too, by Jove!"

The vivid sunlight was still about him; nevertheless,

Lost !

the mist was coming ; already he could almost taste its dank, cold breath.

He started downward at a vigorous stride. The heather was as springs to his feet ; the sunshine flushed his being like wine. The old light step came back to him as if he had practised it but yesterday : the step of the shepherd, the gamekeeper, the heather-born, that seems so easy till the neophyte tries to match it, and finds it the gait of an athlete. He looked over his shoulder at the oncoming mist. "So it's to be a race," he thought. "I've been fitter in my time ; but even old sheep can trot downhill."

He spurred ; but the mist followed hard like a white host pursuing a beaten enemy. Sometimes it leaped forward, shooting out curling tongues or feelers like a blind sea-snake questing for prey ; sometimes it rolled up its front with an odd rotatory motion, as if invisible wheels were at work ; again it stooped low like a hound hurrying, nose on trail ; but ever it spread, and ever its pace increased. Its speed was incredible. Finding himself swiftly overhauled, Kenneth halted and took his bearings. In case of the worst, it would be well to have a definite notion of direction, to strike a bee-line and keep to it rigorously.

He looked back again, drawing in his breath almost defiantly. The next minute, as if accepting the challenge, the mist was upon him—cold, clammy, sodden. The first whiff went down his throat, nauseous as stale seltzer, chilling him to the boots.

"Phew !" he said aloud. "Phew ! that's nasty !"

He shut his eyes mechanically. When he opened them again he could not see three feet ahead of him. The whole world was a swimming white sea, eyeless, sunless, featureless.

He went on again, not with the first light, long stride, but slowly and with extreme caution, his face set

Faces in the Mist

resolutely in the direction of home. In a mist bewildered people tend to tread a circle. He knew of a man, a cocksure, omniscient cockney, thus caught, who circled helplessly for two days, and was then found, at the point of death, within a hundred yards of where the mist overtook him. But, of course, Kenneth was on his guard. He would keep straight forward across the stretch of level moor that separated him from the valleys below, deflecting neither to right nor left.

Presently the wind died as if choked off, the mist ceased to race, and gathered itself into brooding closeness and possessed all things in a drizzly, dreary silence. Save the swish and risp of his own feet in the heather, there was neither sound nor movement. Of a sudden it occurred to him that he had lost his reckoning. Thinking that he was going north, he faced about to go south; certain he was going west, he turned in his tracks to go east. Then he stood and felt the dismal, baffling thing with his hands. Ugh! How dreary and how vexing! Kenneth was not a grumbler, but he felt keenly that this was unfortunate. He was engaged for dinner, and there were particular reasons for keeping the engagement. It looked as if he must fail.

Yet again he went on, but almost immediately stopped, the breath held in his breast. Was it fancy, or did he hear someone calling? He listened, his whole being intent in his ears. But the mist brooded in undisturbed, grave-like silence. He was mistaken; no one called. Once more he started, and once more stopped. Either his fancy was tricking him or someone was calling. He halloed, putting all the might of a pair of strong lungs into the effort. Then he listened with breathless intensity. Faint, but unmistakable, came the response. For certainty, he halloed a second time; and now there was no doubt that someone answered him. He went on quickly, guided by the

Lost !

responses to his repeated hallooing. A sudden excitement beat through him. Who was this unknown, this fellow-victim of the blinding, obliterating fog? Presently he discovered that the voice was a woman's.

"Elsie come out to join me, and caught like myself" he instantly thought. He was the idol of his sister, and her idolatry had evidently prompted this hazardous and very indiscreet adventure.

"Coming!" he shouted lustily. "Coming! Let me know exactly where you are."

"Here!" was the answer. "Here!" The voice seemed quite close, and expressed gladness and relief, as was natural.

"Keep still," he responded. "I'll be with you in a minute, or less."

He plunged on, taking two strides in one, and tripped over some hidden obstacle, nearly falling. As he pulled himself together, impatient over his own bungling, he discerned a dark object looming vaguely through the white mist, and sprang for it in delight. But midway he pulled up as if suddenly petrified. It was indeed a woman, but the woman was not Elsie.

"Oh!" she gasped, in acute disappointment. "Oh!"

"Pardon me," he said, doffing his cap, "if I seem to have come too rudely. I thought it was my sister."

"And I thought it was some of my own people," she answered. "We're quits. Don't apologise."

They stood scarcely a foot apart, looking into each other's eyes, and he noted that hers gave no token of shrinking. He instantly made out that she was no native, and rather by intuition than observation knew she was young, good-looking and fashionable. Who was she? What had brought her there? As if divining the unspoken question, she remarked, "It appears I'm lost. This fog took me quite by surprise. Do you happen to know the way out?"

"Wish I could say 'yes,'" he answered; "but——"

Faces in the Mist

"Then you are lost, too," she interrupted, her brows crinkling in vexation.

"I ought to know every foot of the ground," he replied. "But a hill mist is among the most bewildering things of Nature."

"So I have discovered. Can you shout?"

"I'm not a North Sea steam syren. You've had an example of my skill and power."

"If you please, will you shout now?"

The tone was earnest, almost beseeching. Immediately he put a hand to each side of his mouth and obeyed, calling in turn to all the four quarters. There was no response. The mist lay close as in silent derision. The girl bit her lip.

"It's too stupid and provoking for anything!" she declared.

"It's difficult to make sound travel in such a mist," he explained scientifically.

"It's difficult to make anything travel," she returned, her brows puckering more deeply. "I've been walking an hour like a gin-horse in a circle, I reckon."

"That's the tendency. May I offer you my aid in trying to get out?"

"The blind leading the blind," she said, with a little catch of the breath. "Will you please shout again?"

He did, she joining her voice to his, but the sound fell dead a dozen yards away.

"Lost all right," she remarked succinctly, after listening in vain. "Better move on, I guess, somewhere."

"You have not told me whether I may try to aid you," he reminded her.

"Oh, thank you," she returned cordially. "But I guess I can manage for myself. This pesky fog must have a limit, an edge, somewhere."

Lost !

"Hard to find it," he observed gravely. "And, unfortunately, the place is not without dangers."

"What dangers?" She clipped the words sharply and with a peculiar emphasis that suggested defiance.

"Chiefly precipices," he explained briefly. "And in a blinding, stupefying mist like this it's the easiest thing in the world to walk over them."

"You mean it's the most difficult thing in the world not to walk over them. Accidents of that kind happen?"

"Yes."

"And then there's an inquest, and a wise homily on the folly of strangers in adventuring their lives among savage hills. I know. You may try to help me if you like. How do you propose to do it?"

She was regarding him intently. Her manner was precise and businesslike. Though obviously vexed, she was neither dismayed nor flustered. Nor was she embarrassed. Her coolness astonished him.

"You put me in rather a quandary there," he answered. "I can at least walk first."

"And, by going first over the precipice, warn me. Your mother wouldn't thank me when I told her the tale of chivalry. Please try another shout."

He tried another shout, and another and another, she aiding with her highest soprano note. Then both held their breath. Not a sound in response. They might be calling to the dead.

"It's too ridiculous for anything!" she cried.

She was in the mood between laughing and weeping—so the masculine mind judged. But next minute he corrected this erroneous judgment. For half a second he regarded her critically. There was intelligence in the clear, frank, undaunted eyes, force of will in the firmly-moulded chin, character in every feature of the fine face. The general impression was one of resource and self-reliance, coupled with that subtle

Faces in the Mist

sense of perfect well-being, that exquisite harmony of the blood which in the general result means beauty. She was beautiful even under the disadvantages of a dripping mist. With a feeling as of one spying or eavesdropping he turned to go.

"Am I to follow in your footsteps?" she asked, ready to follow.

"Except when I stumble," was the reply.

"Then I'm to use my own discretion. I see."

"There are also bog-holes," he remarked over his shoulder, after a little, and, as if in proof of the statement, there and then went plump into one. She gave a little cry of alarm, but he scrambled out laughing, and she laughed with him, in a relieved, frank, girlish way.

"In this country we like to prove all things," he observed blithely.

"So I see," she returned, and again they laughed together.

Without ceremony he held out his hand; she took it, and, so assisted, leaped lightly across the heather-screened pool.

"Thank you so much," she said pleasantly. "Are you very wet?"

"More soiled than wet," he replied. "It's nothing. A little sun or fire and a brush will make all clean again."

They walked in silence for some time, and then, as in sudden doubt, the girl asked, "Have you any idea where we're going?"

He was forced to own that his notions of direction and position were hazy. For the first time a real concern showed itself in the girl's face. This was getting to be something more than a trivial incident in a walk, an adventure to be done with quickly and laughed over afterwards.

"And it's getting late," she said, looking at her

Lost !

watch. "They'll be alarmed about me at home—and about you, too," she added, lest he might think her selfish.

Kenneth also looked at his watch. His dinner engagement was already as good as broken. But that was now a small consideration. A new situation had arisen. A new charge was unexpectedly thrust upon him, one of extreme delicacy and no little difficulty. Had he found a man wandering in the mist, it would have been nothing. But a girl, and such a girl! Kenneth never felt responsibility till that moment.

"Seems to me we're bamboozled and lost all right," she said, eyes and face clouded with trouble. "And the abominable fog isn't getting any lighter."

"On the contrary, it's thickening," returned Kenneth. "I wish it would begin to move again. When it stands absolutely still like this——" He checked himself sharply for frightening his companion.

"Then it's dangerous," she said, interpreting his thoughts.

"At any rate, it's more awkward," he admitted.

"We *must* get out of it," she declared decisively.

"We simply *must*."

She was not of those who fold the hands in a difficulty and say "Kismet." Nevertheless she was vaguely conscious of a certain element of futility in her resolute declaration. You cannot argue with a fog. You cannot work on its feelings. It is not to be coerced, nor cajoled, nor flattered. It was about them now like a shroud; it brooded over them with the solemn stillness of a Brahmin priest at his meditations. It blindfolded them, wrapped them in an elastic blanket of vapour, and while pretending to give them complete liberty, held them helpless prisoners. That was its ghastly satire. They resumed their tramp, Kenneth leading as before, and the

Faces in the Mist

girl close at his heels, and rather disposed to force the pace. They crossed some bogland slowly and gingerly, he giving a hand where oozy runnels and pools had to be leaped, she frankly accepting the aid. Then they got in among a litter of rocks—huge, wild, forbidding. They halted, looking at each other.

"Let us shout," the girl said with the energy of desperation. "Perhaps they're out looking for us. They must hear; they must."

Not without difficulty and damage to his hands, Kenneth clambered up a jagged rock, and, perched on some giddy foothold, shouted as he had never before shouted in all his life, once, twice, thrice. Then they shouted together till their throats were raw and their lungs panting. Not a sound came in return. The dense, brooding mist held everything.

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CHAPTER II

A DESPERATE FLIGHT

HE descended and stood beside her, confessing his helplessness. "I am very sorry," he said, as shamefacedly as if he were guilty of some enormous crime.

"Don't," she returned promptly. "It's not right to be unfair—even to ourselves. You're not to blame. Have you really no idea where we have got to?"

"Yes, and that's the worst of it," he answered seriously. "I think I have an idea. If I am right—"

He stopped as if hesitating to complete the sentence.

"If you are right, what?"

"I've brought you far out of the way I meant to take and into one of the most dangerous spots in all these hills."

"Oh!" She could not hide her poignant concern. In spite of her hardihood—and she had plenty of it—she, too, was becoming anxious with the anxiety that has more than a dash of fear. He took the exclamation as censure.

"I'm really awfully sorry," he repeated. "I can't tell you how sorry."

"Please don't be sorry," she entreated, divining that he was hurt. "It's only people who have done wrong that have cause to be sorry. You have done no wrong. On the contrary, you are kind, exceedingly kind, to take so much trouble with me."

"I've been exceedingly blind and stupid," he returned in deep self-disgust.

Were it a case of putting forth his strength, he would joyously have strained every nerve for this

Faces in the Mist

pretty stranger so dramatically and romantically committed to his care. But what are zeal and strength of arm against an enveloping mist? His science was baffled, his knowledge foiled, his whole power derided and brought to naught. In all his life before he had never felt so futile, perhaps because in all his life he had never been so eager to help. The quick intelligence of the girl beside him discerned something of his mood.

"Will you grant me a favour just—just as if we were not strangers who don't even know each other's names?" she asked.

"If I am able," he replied. "Just at present my favours aren't worth much."

"Please let me judge. While this adventure lasts, don't indulge in self-blame. I feel very sincerely indebted to you. I know you could get along better without me. You're extra cautious on my account, afraid to take risks, and all that. I hinder you."

"You must not say that," he rejoined, with an emphasis that was almost brusque. "For it isn't true. You don't hinder me. I'm befogged, completely befogged, that's the simple truth. What I am trying to do for you I'm trying to do for myself at the same time. I dare say you'd have gone downhill better without me."

"I claim a woman's privilege and forbid you to speak like that," she responded. "And now let us think how to get out."

"That's brave and generous, at any rate, and I thank you," he said warmly. "I think you were born for adventure." She laughed, blushing rosily.

"Can you tell such things from casual observation?"

"I can guess like my neighbours. And now, if you please, keep a foot or two behind me and be careful how and where you step."

A Desperate Plight

Once more they went on, groping about rocks, in and out of labyrinths that seemed especially designed for the perplexity of the lost and bewildered. Of a sudden the girl tripped, caught at a rock, and sat down with a suppressed gasp.

"You are tired," he said, turning quickly to her aid.

She was up before his outstretched hand could reach her.

"Mustn't think of 't," she returned. "I'm not going to be tired till we get out of this."

"But you are," he insisted. "You are tired, and must have a rest."

There was something masterful in his tone, something of the authority of the stronger taking charge of the weaker. Then a new thought struck him.

"Perhaps you are hungry as well. It happens that I've some biscuits, slipped into my pocket by my mother. They're poor fare, but——"

"The best procurable in the circumstances," she put in, with a brave show of lightness. "Since we seem to be gipsying under disadvantages, I consent to share them with you."

He protested that he was not hungry, but she declined to listen. So he found her a seat, spread his mackintosh on it, and stood beside her while she

"The fact is revealed to me that I really am hungry," she owned, after her first biscuit. "How lucky we are!"

"Our old proverb has it that a wise man never takes to the hills without a coat for the rain and a little something in his pocket for the hunger," he told her.

"So you've been provident, to my great benefit. Are—are you used to this sort of experience?"

"I've had it before, but never in quite such an acute form. Perhaps my absence made me forget how treacherous the mists are hereabout."

Faces in the Mist

"Then you've lived away from here?"

"Yes."

"Abroad?"

"A little."

"Where?"

"Egypt, India and China, principally."

"Far enough East, anyway. Have you never gone West?"

"You mean across the Atlantic? No, never."

She ate her biscuits steadily and with relish. Her teeth were excellent, and her appetite was such as the healthy young person enjoys after vigorous exercise. Nevertheless, she was thinking. In truth, her interest was keenly piqued.

"You ought to go West," she said with conviction.

"Should like to," he owned. "But the chance hasn't come."

"Make it."

"And defy the fates?" he laughed.

"I thought the fates were dead long ago. They belonged to the ancient world that believed in Diana of the Ephesians and other defunct divinities, didn't they? In my country people carve out their own fortunes without any idea of consulting the fates."

"And what, pray, is your country?"

"America. And yours?"

"Where you are."

"Then—you are a native, after all?" The words were pronounced with surprise. "You're not like the others I have seen."

"Have you seen many?"

"A few."

She regarded him intently, her anxieties momentarily forgotten in the longing to ask more questions and make them pointed, to learn something definite of this chivalrous young stranger into whose hands accident committed her. He was equally curious,

A Desperate Plight

equally interested ; but he was yet more preoccupied with the problem—a baffling one so far—of getting his charge back to safety and her friends.

She rose, shook the crumbs from her lap, and handed him his coat, thanking him in a manner that made his heart tingle. But he did not accept the mackintosh.

"Please sit where you were for a little," he said, respreading the coat for her.

"Why?"

She was almost startlingly direct at times, but that he understood was the American manner.

"I want to do a little exploring," he explained, "before you venture farther. At any moment we might find ourselves on the edge of a cliff."

"I am not sure that I ought to allow you," she responded. "If anything happens to you, if you go over a cliff, for instance, think of the situation then."

"Better that I should go over alone, than that we should both go over. That's scriptural, at all events. But I'll take care. Only, I have bungled this thing horribly, and, cliff or no cliff, I'm going to get you out of the mess if I can."

"I thought it was agreed you were not to indulge in self-condemnation," she observed gravely. "If you do, I shall certainly insist on going straight forward, or perhaps on exploring for myself."

"I am admonished," he laughed. "By the way, it would be better to have the mackintosh about you."

"I'm clad for the hills, thank you."

"But not for a sluicing mist. There, now you can both sit on it and have it as a wrap."

He had thrown the coat about her shoulders as though by some vested right. That, of course, was a man's way, and, woman-like, she admired manliness even while pretending to kick against it.

"What next?" she asked, sitting down obediently.

Faces in the Mist

"You are to sit perfectly still, and not attempt to move until I come back to you," he cautioned.

She promised, her eyes saying frankly, "I trust you." He left her, intimating he would not be long away. For a minute his shrouded form was darkly visible, groping its slow way downward. Then the edacious fog swallowed it. But she could still hear the sound of his heavy hill shoes on the stones, sometimes knocking, sometimes slipping, always uncertain and suggestive of unseen dangers. Gradually it died, and she was alone in the smothering mist.

Alone! An icy, eerie sensation thrilled through her. She shivered. The silence was tremendous. It was the silence of an obliterated world, gigantic, oppressive, cutting her off from all past associations, all contact with living things. Almost for the first time in her existence she was afraid, not with a paltry everyday fear, but with the keen, cold fear that has the sharpness of steel and the clutch of frost. In beating awe she hearkened for some sound, some token of life, unconsciously craning in the direction in which her companion disappeared. She hearkened in vain. The hush was the hush of a vast tomb set in the midst of a blank desolation. She had a horrible feeling of having been carried out into the dense void and forsaken. Better to have gone forward at any risk. Then, at any rate, she would be doing, not waiting helplessly as now, alone, a prisoner in the suffocating vapour, her courage drained by intolerable suspense. She had a vehement impulse to call aloud; had, indeed, to shut her lips tight to keep in the cry.

For diversion she fell to thinking of the grave and courteous stranger whom chance had shot so wonderfully into her path, whose mandate she of all people in the world was thus meekly, if miserably, obeying. It was like a wild dream, an incident in some outrageous romance. Who or what was he? One of the

A Desperate Plight

crop of noblemen grown so lavishly in that singular region? The bearer of a historic name? Perhaps. At any rate, he was a gentleman. In that matter she read his title for herself, clear and easy as an open book.

He was handsome, too. So much she admitted in the confidence of her own thoughts from the first. Handsome, chivalrous, unknown, and now risking his life for her. Ah! Drawing a long, deep breath, she gulped a mouthful of mist on which she nearly choked. What was he doing? Did he guess that she waited for him with an impatience verging on torture? Why was he so long away? A horrified shudder seized her. What if he were killed? Why, oh, why had she consented to sit still and let him go on alone? It was not like her. People said she was courageous; what was become of her courage now? It seemed that this baffling fog had curdled all her wits.

Her thoughts leaped to her own people. They would be in terror about her; most probably they were out searching for her while she sat drearily on a rock waiting for a man to whom she had never been introduced, of whose very name she was ignorant. It was all extremely absurd, with the kind of absurdity that gives the mouth a wry and bitter twist. What would her friends think of it all? Would they construe it as a romantic adventure, or would they say, starchily, she ought to be more mindful of the conventions? She hardly knew. What she felt with piercing force was that she must bestir herself somehow.

Again she listened painfully. The sepulchral silence was unchanged, unbroken. A tingling sense of doom came upon her. Was she deserted? She stood up, resolved at all hazards to fare on as best she might. But next instant her heart, beating deliriously, asked whether she meant treason to her knight?

Faces in the Mist

Treason? How could her act be treason to one whom she had never seen before, to whom she was no more than a casual wayfarer greeted civilly in the by-going? "But he has promised to return, and is jeopardising his life for you," whispered the sweet monitor. "It is not in you to be ungrateful." Persuaded, she sat down. No, she could not be ungrateful. He had said, "Wait till I return," and his goodness gave her no option but to obey. Only, would the Guardian of brave men bring him quickly? She could not endure much longer.

Presently she found herself fanning away the mist, and laughed with a slight hysterical kink. "Mrs. Partington mopping back the Atlantic!" she reflected. "Pamela Fairhurst, you'll be in a panic next, if you don't look out; and *that* won't help you."

It would not, indeed; and she strove to be calm, to show in this murky desolation something of the fortitude she displayed so easily in the sunshine. But what, what was keeping him? She forgot all else in the agony of that question. Her whole thought, her whole being was concentrated on the man with whom she had scarcely an hour's acquaintance.

All at once she noticed that the mist seemed to be thickening, and was losing its steam-like whiteness. She stared into it a moment unwinking, and then drew a quick, terrified breath. She leaped to her feet in a giddiness of horror, and then indeed the pent cry found utterance. It was rather a scream than a shout or call, a scream of living terror, an appeal for instant aid. Having uttered it, she held her breath hard, listening. Not a sound rewarded her. What should she do? Go forward, of course. Forward where? Which was forward and which was backward? She had a vision of herself at a crag-foot, maimed, battered, bleeding, crawling; nay, worse, lying quite still and stark. Ugh! Ugh!

A Desperate Plight

The night was descending quickly, in league, as it were, with the mist. Even as she gazed she could perceive the white become grey, the grey drab, the drab black. Gracious heaven, was it to be a night on the mountain, a night perched on a rock from which she could not move a foot save at the risk of her life?

Just then her heart leaped, raced a second, and stood still. From far below came a call, faint, fog-choked, yet unmistakably distinct. She answered, every atom of energy in her voice. Again the call came, and again she answered. He was returning. Thank God, thank God!

By and by she heard the scrambling of feet on the rocks, then a figure appeared, climbing in desperate haste. She could hear the hard, fast breathing. Rising quickly, she stepped forward, a cry of gladness on her tongue. But the man spoke first.

"Miss Pamela—is it possible!" he said excitedly.

She stopped as if pierced by an arrow. It was not her unknown friend, but one of her father's men, one of a rescue party out seeking her.

CHAPTER III

AN ACT OF PROVIDENCE

"CALLUM," said Pamela, drawing breath slowly to steady herself, "there's a man—down—there—somewhere."

"Gosh bless me!" ejaculated Callum. "Gosh bless my soul alive!"

"Yes, and I'm afraid something dreadful has happened to him."

"It's the very place for something dreadful to happen," said Callum. "It has made more funerals in my time than all the other places round about put together. Was the man daft, Miss Pamela?"

"I don't know what you mean, Callum."

Callum tapped his head significantly. "A screw loose hereabouts?" he said. "What sent the body down there in the mist?"

"He went for me."

Callum's curiosity blazed up like tow at the touch of fire. Had Miss Pamela, then, a little unsuspected romance on hand, that she was thus holding vigil by the terrible Cairn Dhu Crag? "A man," Callum repeated to himself, mentally slapping his leg. "Ho, ho, my lass, ho, ho!"

The man was not from Castle Bruan, that Callum could vouch. For all at Castle Bruan were running about distractedly, crying that Pamela was lost on the hills. Here clearly was matter for the entertainment of idle hours. Meanwhile, despite the haste and discomfort, some definite information was desirable.

An Act of Providence

"And who might the man be, Miss Pamela?" he asked.

"I don't know, Callum," was the reply. "I don't know, and that makes it all the worse."

"A shepherd body, maybe?" suggested Callum.

"No, not a shepherd."

"Not a shepherd? Maybe a gamekeeper, then?"

"No, not a gamekeeper either. A gentleman, whoever he is."

Callum felt inclined to whistle.

"Did he happen to mention his name?" was the next question.

"No, but he left his coat here, meaning to come back. Perhaps his name is on it, though, indeed, it's too dark to see."

"I have spunks," said Callum, promptly, and with remarkable alacrity he struck a match. It spluttered and went out in the wet atmosphere, but Callum persevered. His ardour for knowledge, however, went unsatisfied. The coat bore the maker's name, but not the owner's.

"No clue," said Pamela. "Can you shout, Callum?"

"A wee bit, mem—a wee bit," owned Callum, modestly.

"Then do, please. If he's near he'll hear."

Callum halloed like half a dozen, whistled like a locomotive. There was a whir of startled wings, and then the old dead stillness.

"If he hears, he doesn't let on, mem," Callum remarked. "But, indeed, I'm jalousing it's not climbing back here he's thinking of, poor body!"

"You mean he's not able?"

"Just that, Miss Pamela. Have you ever seen the Cairn Dhu Crag in clear daylight?"

"No, never."

"If you had you'd understand. I'm thinking that,

Faces in the Mist

if he's there, he'll just have to bide a wee as he is. There's a fine splore down by."

"Over me?" said Pamela, trembling in sudden contrition.

"Over you, mem," responded Callum. "They think you're dead and lost, and all the rest of it. And now, if you're ready, we'll just be stepping, for indeed they're kind of beside themselves. If I was you, Miss Pamela, I'd give me your hand. The way is not just the easiest you could wish."

Half-dazed as in a dream, she gave it, and they began the perilous descent. She slipped and stumbled often, her heart gasping in her mouth; but the firm grip of Callum's hard fingers kept her from falling. With wondrous skill and the sure feet of a goat he piloted her, zig-zaging this way and that, scrambling, leaping, as it seemed to Pamela, into yawning chasms of mist, but ever making steady progress. When her head was too dizzy to give further heed to her feet, they reached a brawling stream and drew breath.

"This burn will take us home fine," Callum informed her. "And it's putting our best foot foremost we'll better be. They're awful put about at the Castle down by."

"As fast as you like, Callum," she panted. "Go on; I will follow."

There was more light now. The moon was up and shone with a vapoury glister as through entanglements of filmy gauze or gossamer. To overtried nerves the effect was spectral and awesome, rather than beautiful. But the additional light was welcome. Callum struck into a winding sheep-track by the brookside, Pamela following closely and faithfully in his steps. Presently they came upon a hill road made and used by farmers for the carting of the winter's fuel of peats, and here they proceeded more easily. Callum made no mistakes. Pamela admired his

An Act of Providence

instinct for direction, and wondered over the ill-success of the stranger, seeing he professed a native's knowledge of the hills.

And why had he not returned to her? There could be but one explanation—an accident. He was deaf to Callum's shouting; that meant a bad accident. Her blood ran cold. Trying to find a safe way for her, he came to disaster. And how was she appreciating his chivalry? By clutching at the first chance of succour and running away. That had an ugly smack of cowardice and treason. The stinging thought made her flush hotly. She would, indeed, have turned and gone back, had there been anyone to go back with her. But Callum, in obedience to orders, plodded steadily on. Nevertheless, it appeared he too was engaged with thoughts of the mysterious unknown—the man left, as he judged, still and stark among the crags above.

"The man was a stranger belike, Miss Pamela," he observed, half turning head and shoulders. "Just a veesitor body."

The lives of visitors were not, of course, to be wantonly sacrificed, but they had a comparatively low value in the district.

"He said he was a native, though he didn't look like one," she answered.

"Dear me!" said Callum, reflectively. "That's droll!" And after a pause. "It was queer, too, he didn't mention his name. That would give us a notion, maybe, who he is. He had the ways of a decent, respectable man, Miss Pamela?"

"I've told you he is a gentleman," was the curt reply.

"And to be sure that's true," Callum owned. "Fuich! it's a sieve I have in my head, and not a memory at all; though, indeed, it's not as easy as supping porridge to make out a gentleman from the

Faces in the Mist

other thing in a bad hill mist. Yes, it's queer he didn't mention his name."

"There was no occasion," Pamela answered, with a touch of severity.

"Oh, just so!" said Callum, nowise perturbed.

"Just so, to be sure!"

The light being better now, and the way easier, his curiosity grew more and more importunate. He turned over in his mind the names of all the likely men he knew, and rejected them one by one. For the present the only certain thing was this, that Miss Pamela had had an adventure, and more or less resented inquiries. Callum did not fail to make his own alluring deductions. He knew, or, what was precisely the same, thought he knew why she had crossed the Atlantic, guessed shrewdly where gossip fell short, and, putting conjecture to knowledge, made up a dish of the most appetising ingredients. Ah, these pretty fluttering birds of paradise, demure as fawns, dark as mountain tarns! Rich and poor, gentle and simple, they were all alike, all as quirky as old Mother Eve. Who, for example, would have suspected Pamela? Yet here she was, white as a ghost, trembling like an aspen, and hardly able to contain her agitation, in brief, terror-stricken, because somewhere by the Cairn Dhu Cragg lay a man, a strange man, in very sorry case. Poor fellow! He would sleep with a rough pillow and chilly blankets, if, indeed, he were in a condition to care how he slept. Pamela broke in on these ruminations.

"Tell me, Callum," she said eagerly, "are they very much upset about me at home?"

"Ay, indeed they are, Miss Pamela; sore, sore upset," Callum replied. "Ye see, mem, they thought you were out all alone by yourself; no man in the business at all, as ye might say."

"And they were right. I really managed to lose myself without any aid whatever."

An Act of Providence

"But the man?" rejoined Callum, keeping tenaciously to the point that interested him most. "He was there, Miss Pamela?"

"He appeared on the scene after I had accomplished the feat of getting lost."

Callum grinned, winking privily at the mist and the moonlight. He was a knowing man, Callum, endured no dust in his eyes, knew exactly how to put two and two together and obtain a result perfectly suitable to any theory. At Scotland Yard he would have performed miracles; in law he would have been a prodigy of astuteness. As it was, he found vast entertainment in seeing through other people's pretences.

"And where might he come from?" he asked.

"Out of the fog. I think he was lost, too."

"Ah, ha!" thought Callum, "a pretty pair! oh, ay, a pretty pair!"

After a moment's silence he remarked thoughtfully, "He came out of the fog, and then again went into the fog, and he's in it now by all appearance, somewhere."

"And not safe and well, I am afraid," said Pamela.

"Just so," assented Callum. "Just so, to be sure. Not likely safe and well—not at all likely."

The mystery deepened. All Callum's detective instincts were roused. He was like a hound on the scent. The scent, it was true, was broken. But the truth would come out, must come out—could not, in fact, be hidden. That was Callum's consolation for some present disappointment in regard to scantiness of information. "Out of the mist into the mist; over a cliff; and Pamela waiting for my fine gentleman to come back. Just so, just so, to be sure." He sniffed a very pretty sensation.

The road became broader and smoother, the moon

Faces in the Mist

clearer, the mist less thick. After skirting a black patch of fir plantation, the road forked suddenly, one branch going sharply to the right, and the other as sharply to the left. Taking the right branch, they touched presently on a small sedgy lake or tarn, known to be haunted, said to be bottomless, and now gleaming like ebony. Pamela quaked coldly as the startled water-fowl rose screaming. Almost immediately after passing the lake they plunged into a wood, dank and thickly roofed by interlaced boughs. Here was a black darkness that no moon-shine could penetrate, and Pamela was glad to keep close to Callum. In a few minutes they passed through a wicket-gate, and stepped into a hard, smooth, well-kept path. This took them through another thicket, curved suddenly, and, as it were, shot them forth without warning upon the gravelled space before the Castle.

Pamela's vision in that moment was strangely blurred. Perhaps the mist was still in her eyes, perhaps the wild pounding of her heart affected them. She was distinctly aware, however, of a humming commotion, and then of sudden cries of joy. A figure separated itself from the others, and she ran towards it. Her mother! Next instant the two were in each other's arms.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" sobbed Mrs. Fairhurst. "What a fright you have given us! We thought you were lost or killed."

With a mighty effort Pamela controlled herself. "So I was—very nearly," she answered.

"Child," cried her mother in the next breath, "you shiver as if you had the ague, and you are drenched!"

"Am I?" returned Pamela, simply. She had not known.

"Soaked!" said her mother anxiously, "absolutely

An Act of Providence

soaked! Wherever have you been, and what's this?
A coat! Whose is it?"

"It's a long story," replied Pamela. "Come
inside and I'll tell you. Oh, I am so tired, so tired!"

Her mother put an arm about her waist and led
her indoors, the buzzing, excited group following close
behind.

CHAPTER IV

"MOTHER, I HAVE KILLED A MAN!"

WHAT with excitement and the fascinations of a thrilling, downright mystery, Castle Bruan slept little that night. Pamela told her story with sobs and looks that always left something to be inferred by the ingenious, something delectably stimulating to be imagined.

"My dear, it was madness for you to venture as you did in a strange place," her mother remarked, after the first spasm of anxiety had spent itself. "Whatever made you do it?"

Pamela neither disputed the statement nor answered the question. Her confused and beating mind was occupied with other things.

"Mother, I have killed a man!" she said, disconsolately, breaking in on soft, well-meant words of comfort. Mrs. Fairhurst, who was plump and had a generous supply of warm, well-nurtured blood in her veins, suddenly felt a crawling cold at the spine.

"Pam!" she cried, aghast, "Pam, whatever do you mean?"

"What I say, mother. I'm sure he's dead."

"I hope not, my dear; I hope not," Mrs. Fairhurst returned, piously. "But if unfortunately he should be, you're not to blame. You didn't push him over. It's an act of Providence, anyway."

"What is an act of Providence?" Pamela asked, as if clutching at the idea.

"An act of Providence," replied Mrs. Fairhurst,

"Mother. I have Killed a Man!"

with solemn deliberation, "an act of Providence is—well, something distressing, you know, that nobody can help."

"When things go wrong downstairs, and you find fault, but can't discover the culprit, is the thing, whatever it may be, an act of Providence?"

"Ah!" replied Mrs. Fairhurst, with immense wisdom, "that's different—that's entirely different."

"You know it really isn't, mother. When you scold over something that has happened, and everybody is apparently innocent, you know perfectly well the fault was due to stupidity or carelessness, or both. It's the same in this case—with the difference that I know I'm to blame."

"You take it too seriously, Pam," rejoined her mother, a trifle impatiently. "Quite too seriously, my dear."

And in spite of a manner that was generally blithe, a heart that was commonly light, and a face that was often dimpled in smiles, Pamela's disposition certainly was to take things seriously. Her concern, her perturbation in the present instance was not only unfortunate, but actually savoured of folly. With all her motherly qualities, and they were neither few nor small, Mrs. Fairhurst was vexed, plainly and visibly vexed. That Pamela should cross the Atlantic to turn the heads of the British aristocracy, that an estate should be bought in the Highlands, a beautiful and historic estate, to make her dazzling way easy, and that she should start in this outrageous fashion was something more than annoying. Big events were pending. Were they to be spoiled because a stranger happened by chance to fall over a cliff in a fog? The thing, of course, was out of the question. Mrs. Fairhurst regretted the fate of the dead man, supposing him to have quitted this life. But then life is never a freehold. It is the destiny of men to die,

Faces in the Mist

sometimes tragically. Why they went so it was not for her to say. She was not accountable for the mysteries of Providence. And in any case she had a definite mission on hand, a mission that was to set the name of Fairhurst beside the proudest names in the land. She thought of all this quickly, trenchantly, like one fired by a great ambition, fixed in a great resolution. And once again Pamela broke in wretchedly:

"Oh, I'm sure he's dead! And he'd have got down safely, quite safely, if it wasn't for me."

"Reuben," said Mrs. Fairhurst, turning impatiently to her husband, "you talk to her. Why, if she really was guilty, if she had carried him up and dropped him over, and seen him crushed below, she couldn't take on more. Talk to her, Reuben."

So her father gently expostulated with Pamela, patted her fondly, told her she was fretting herself into a fever, and would certainly be ill if she didn't take care. He for his part was rejoiced to have her back alive and whole, if for the moment a little out of spirits. She must overcome her agitation. As for the man, his luck seemed to be hard, but such things happen. In future she must be more careful. The stranger would turn up, somehow, somewhere.

"What you need now, Pam, my dear," he ended in his practical way, "is a good hot supper, followed by a good long sleep, and the sooner you have both the better. Your cheeks are too white, my dear, and your lips a great deal too blue."

But Pamela still declined to consider herself.

"You will send in the morning as soon as it is light, and find him?" she entreated.

"Yes, yes," her father answered, as if humouring a sick child. "In the morning we'll send and find him."

"Mother, I have Killed a Man!"

"And I'll head the expedition," cried her brother Carew, in tingling delight. "It'll be corking!"

He had listened to the tale breathlessly, and spied adventure even more exciting than the running down of hapless people with a motor.

"You?" retorted his father. "You? To what point of the compass would you lead it?"

"Carew dear," remarked his mother softly, "we've had about enough of this. No more hazards, dear. They don't pay."

Carew subsided, not because his mother was afraid, but because his father was scornful. All the same, his mind was made up.

"Obviously, Callum's the man," Mr. Fairhurst observed. "Having found you, he brought you home well and expeditiously, didn't he, Pam?"

"Quite, quite. He has the eyes of a cat and the feet of a chamois. It was wonderful."

"He is accustomed to these hills, you see. Some others we could name are disposed to envy him his success. Very well, he will go out assisted first thing in the morning. And now, dearie, something hot, and off to bed. To-morrow we'll hear the story more in detail."

At his entreaty she made a pretence of eating; then good-night kisses were exchanged, Pamela being straitly enjoined by her counsellors to dismiss the day's experience from her mind. They could send her to bed loaded with good advice, but they were not of the enchanters who command the elfin god of sleep. Pamela lay painfully awake, seeing horrid visions in the darkness, dreaming dreams that made her shudder under blanket and eiderdown.

In the servants' hall, meanwhile, Callum held high carnival. For him also Mr. Fairhurst prescribed the "something hot" cure for fatigue, and Callum was all zeal to carry out his master's wishes. Callum,

Faces in the Mist

in fact, loved good victuals, and was a judge of beverages.

"Will it be wine?" the butler inquired affably. Callum laughed.

"Wine," says he. "Wine, to be sure, and that's a grand notion, too. You know the wine of my country. Put it in English, my lad, and be quick with a droppie. Mr. Fairhurst's mortal afraid I may catch cold."

He was bombarded with questions, but deftly put them off.

"One thing at a time, good folks; one thing at a time. I'm extrornar busy," Callum would respond between his mouthfuls. "Dead men don't run away, that I ever heard of. As for them that's in a hurry here, let them take a run to the Cairn Dhu Craggs and back, and they'll understand my present feeling." It was manifestly one of ardent affection for meat and drink.

He was in gurgling good-humour, arched eyebrows knowingly, looked aslant, dropped hints, skilfully kept expectation on edge. The company purred about him, speculating awesomely, while awaiting his pleasure. Callum smiled as he listened. Ay, ay, they might guess and guess. The secret was his. They were in the dark till he chose to speak. And he was in no haste. For it is sweet to taste the delights of being a hero—at leisure and like a connoisseur. He had scooped all the honours. Others were out, but he it was who rescued the distressed maiden; he knew all that was known of the mysterious knight. Besides, the fare was good. Why should he hurry?

At last Callum wiped his mouth like a moist Benedictine monk, and beamed on his auditory. It was the signal to crowd close.

"Tell us, Callum!" they cried in quivering expectation. "Tell us!"

"Mother, I have Killed a Man!"

Callum wiped his mouth again, sorry that he was not beginning instead of ending the excellent cheer.

"Let me think," he said. "It's a queer tangle of a business. Where's the beginning?"

He crooked a finger jovially at the butler.

"A wee droppie more of your wine, my lad, if you please," he called. "It's very dry the mist has made my throat, too. Eh, man!" said Callum after the draught; "and you've the keys of the cellar!" There was a deep significance in the words.

The tale he meant to tell was such as would have made the listeners hold breath and gape; for the circumstances were stimulating, and Callum had imagination. But in the midst of the first sentence a message came that Mr. Fairhurst desired his presence in the library.

"Lo and behold!" cried Callum, looking round with a grand air. "Lo and behold! ye see how it is. It's a pity ye can't have the story, for it's wonderful. But I must be stepping and not keep the big man kicking his heels."

They saw his importance in the affair, and tingled yet more importunately.

"You'll come back and tell us, won't you, Callum?" they implored.

"Maybe," returned Callum, buttoning his coat and straightening himself. "Maybe. I must see Mr. Fairhurst before promising, and there's Miss Pamela to consider."

"She's dreadfully upset!" put in a maid. "I saw her all of a tremble, poor thing!"

"So would you, too, if you was in her shoes," said Callum. "It's a bonnie business, I'll tell ye that much, and no man can guess the end of it. Well, I'm off!" And with an air of profound mystery and vast importance he stalked away, all eyes following him enviously.

Faces in the Mist

On entering the library his grand airs dropped from him, and he became once more a common mortal.

"You've had something to warm you, Callum?" inquired Mr. Fairhurst.

"Thenk'ee, sir, plenty to warm me," replied Callum. "The right stuff, too, I'm glad to say."

"Good! Now I want you to tell me all you know about this affair."

"It's soon told, sir," Callum responded. "I went up the burn to the Cairn Dhu Crag, being as you might say the only man at home there, and there I found Miss Pamela all her lone in the mist. I brought her down home, and that's about the long and the short of it, sir."

"You did very well, Callum, and I am much obliged to you. But as to the man who appeared and disappeared so strangely, have you no idea who—he is?"

"Not a notion in the world, sir. Miss Pamela thinks he belongs to hereabouts; but if that was true, I'm thinking he'd have more sense."

"Ah! Are all the people hereabouts wise, then, Callum?"

"If you was to ask the parish minister, he'd shake his head," replied Callum, with a grin; "but then it's his business to make much of other folks' failings. If the man was of the district, he'd have sense enough to keep off the Cairn Dhu Crag in a mist. That's what I'm thinking."

"Leaving the question of sense on one side, what do you think has become of him?"

"Ah, that's easier answered, sir. By the body's want of sense in going the way he did, it's my belief that he's lying quiet this minute at a crag-foot. It's God's blessing, sir, Miss Pamela did not go over, too."

"Mother, I have Killed a Man!"

"God's blessing indeed, Callum," agreed Mr. Fairhurst, fervently. "I cannot tell you how thankful we all are for her safety. I've a great mind to have the whole place blown up, and the rocks cleared away, to prevent accidents in future."

"A big job, sir, blowing up a whole hill," observed Callum.

"I have tackled big jobs before now," said Mr. Fairhurst, quietly. "We'll see. Anyway, I want, you, as early as possible in the morning, to take one or two stout fellows with you, and go back and find him. Get a stretcher rigged up, so that he can be carried in case of need, and bring him here, that the poor fellow can be attended to without delay. We must do whatever we can for the hurt man."

"And if he's dead, sir, as well as hurt, am I to bring him here just the same?" Callum inquired.

"Do you really think he's likely to be dead?" Mr. Fairhurst returned, in some disquietude.

"Well, sir," answered Callum, "once over the Cairn Dhu Craggs would do for most men. Maybe he's tougher than ordinar. We'll see."

Mr. Fairhurst drew his brows together. A dead man for whose death one is more or less responsible is not pleasant to think of or handle.

"Then you really expect to find him dead, Callum?"

"That or that way, sir."

"If so, you'd better leave him for the law to take possession of. In case of the worst, send someone down to me at once."

"I'm thinking, sir, his own folks would like to bury him."

"Of course, of course. Only, the first thing is to find out whether he needs burial just yet. I hope not. We won't croak till we're hit. First thing in the morning, Callum. I'll depend on you. Good-night."

Faces in the Mist

"Good-night, sir," responded Callum. "First thing in the morning it'll be."

He was as good as his word. With the dawn the expedition was ready. Callum selected three proved men as helpers, and for a stretcher there was a barn-door taken off its hinges and fastened on poles. Carew was with them, and at the last moment Pamela appeared. They tried to dissuade her from going, but she was not to be dissuaded. She knew the spot, the very spot, and must go to guide them.

"I promise to be very careful," she pleaded with her father. "Only please let me go."

Her looks more than her words prevailed, but, as an extra measure of precaution, Carew and Callum were severally and conjointly charged with her safety.

The morning came radiantly bright. A wind blew now, keen, bracing, sweet with dewy scents, and the mist was scattered. Shreds and patches still clung to wood and cliff, crept fugitive-like about hilltops or coiled in dense folds like vast snakes in chasm and ravine. But they were pursued by the searching wind, sucked up by the conquering sun. By the time the rescue party were out of the lower woods the mountains were a feast of variegated splendour. Even the Cairn Dhu Craggs were magically iridescent. Their leaden greys were turned to silver, their russets to gold. Their iron blackness was warmed to bronze or softened to violet. They glowed like porphyry, gleamed like amethyst, burned like topaz, flashed like diamonds. They were transfigured, yet withal, curiously and subtly, they retained their expression of dire power and darkling terror.

As she drew near them Pamela's heart beat with a smothering pain, a tense, choking anxiety. She did not know why she should be so excited. After all, the hapless stranger was just a stranger, no more.

"Mother, I have Killed a Man!"

No more? She had looked into his eyes, eyes full of concern for her, and was stirred by strange emotions. Their look haunted her. Suddenly, unexpectedly, a new element entered into her life. One day she was lightly, joyously careless, the next she was old with experience. So it appeared to herself. Callum, holding strictly and vigorously to duty, broke in on her burning thoughts.

"By where I found you, Miss Pamela, he'll be lying just about yonder," he said, pointing a finger.

Carew, out for sport, and, as it were, eager to be in at the death, gave a sort of view hallo and began to run. Pamela immediately followed his example, her heart very near her throat. How should they find him they sought? Not dead, gracious Lord, not dead; nor too cruelly hurt, nor disfigured! Not that, not that either!

Reaching his objective, Carew mounted a rock and looked round.

"Don't see him," he remarked, as Pamela came up panting wildly. "But then—say, Pam, you're horribly out of training. That little bit of a sprint has left your face like a saucer. Look! as if you hadn't a drop of blood in you, and go another step."

"I'm not used to such scrambling," returned Pamela, her hand hard at her side. She was so giddy she could scarcely make out the grey, splintered, weather-beaten crags before her, or the bare, sheer face of the dread precipice above. "Somewhere there," she was saying to herself, "somewhere there."

Callum and his men were up in a trice, bustling with ardour, and a systematic search began, between rocks, in clefts and crannies, behind boulders, wherever a man might fall or a body be jammed or hidden. But the stretcher was not needed; and no messenger was dispatched hot-foot to Bruan Castle.

Faces in the Mist

"Not here at all, mem," Callum announced in some disappointment. "Not here at all, living or dead."

"Oh!" said Pamela, and again "Oh!"

She could not tell whether she was glad or sorry. She had pictured to herself tenderly how she would bind up the wounds of the injured man, minister to him while he lay, perhaps hold his fevered head, talk to him soothingly, look once more into his eyes. The mother-heart, the divine instinct of womanhood stirred within her—only to be denied, crushed down. Perhaps on the whole she was sorry. But the vital question remained, What had become of him?

"Take up your barn-door, my lads, and off home with you!" Callum ordered his men. "No church-yard business this time, it appears."

Mr. Fairhurst was greatly relieved to find it so. "Anyway, your man's not dead at the Cairn Dhu Craggs, Pam," he remarked, when the expedition returned empty-handed. "That's one consolation, isn't it, Callum?"

"To be sure, and it ought to be, sir," Callum owned, scratching his shaggy head. "But what's happened to him, that's what's bothering me. The thing's not just canny."

It was contrary to nature and tradition that a man should go headlong over the Cairn Dhu Craggs, as this man manifestly did, and walk away scatheless.

"If we have patience, we may find out both who he is and how he cheated death," said Mr. Fairhurst.

"We will, sir," returned Callum with some decision.

"We will."

And he did. Going forth on business some hours later, he returned hastily and in great agitation. Pamela, as it chanced, met him, and, marking his excitement, guessed the reason.

"Have you found out, Callum?" she asked, a

"Mother, I have Killed a Man!"

sympathetic excitement suddenly throbbing in her own veins. "Do you know who he was?"

"Yes, mem," Callum answered; "I have found out; and it's sore—sore my heart is this day because of it. Oh, the brave lad, the brave lad—to think it was him!"

Callum seemed to be stricken with unutterable grief.

CHAPTER V

MY LORD BENBRECK—CALLUM'S PRAYER

A SHIVER ran through Pamela.

"Somebody you know, somebody of importance?" she asked.

"And it is well you may say that, Miss Pamela," was the response. "Somebody I know; the best lad that ever drew mortal breath, that's who it is. And important, too. Oh, yes! Och, och and ochone, that old Callum is alive to see this day!"

"But who is he, Callum?" Pamela demanded in a beating impatience and anxiety. "Tell me who he is."

Callum mopped his forehead, which was streaming from heat, grief, and agitation.

"Ye'll not know him, mem," he replied. "Ye'll never have heard of him. If you was acquaint with him, ye'd be as sorry as me. For look you, Miss Pamela, if the wicked one himself was to go and pick out the finest lad he could find for his spite, Mr. Kenneth would be the very man he'd choose."

"Kenneth," she repeated, grasping at the name, "Kenneth what?"

"Chisholm, mem," answered Callum. "Chisholm of Kinleath; and if you happened to be born and brought up hereabouts ye'd know what that means."

"It is my misfortune to be a stranger, Callum," she responded, "but you will tell me about him, won't you? Only, first, do you know if he's very badly hurt?"

My Lord Benbreck—Callum's Prayer

"Dying, mem, they say—dying," Callum replied, his voice trembling. "And how could it be anything else, Miss Pamela? Over the Cairn Dhu Crag—could mortal man go over them headlong and live?"

His voice broke and tears sprang to his eyes. A sharp pain shot like an arrow through Pamela's heart.

"Dying!" she repeated, her own face blenching to a deathly white. "Don't say that, Callum. There may be a mistake. How do you know?"

"It is all over the countryside, mem," was the reply. "The story is that he was saving the braw young leddy of Bruan Castle—yourself, Miss Pamela, yourself—when he got his own death, the poor lad!"

"Saving me!" said Pamela, in a gasp of awe and guilt.

"That is how the story goes, mem," said Callum. "Ye'll be knowing yerself if it's true or no."

"Is—is this story all about?" she asked, in a horror of dismay.

"About and running like heather-fire afore the wind," Callum informed her. "There's not been the like of it hardly in my time."

For a moment she stared aghast. The next, remorse, pity and concern were upon her like a river in flood, carrying her off her feet.

"Oh, I cannot tell you how—how vexed, how sorry I am!" she cried. "And the worst of it is, the story is true. He did get hurt for me. When I was lost and helpless in the fog, and he found me, he insisted on finding a way out for me."

"Of course," returned Callum, quickly, "of course! Do you think it is slinking away and leaving you lost in the mist he'd be? Not if he was to die for it twenty times and more. No, no, that would not be the way of a Chisholm. If a leddy needed help, he would give it, never troubling about what might happen to himself."

Faces in the Mist

"That's just the pity of it," she said, a tremor in her voice, her breathing a quick flutter like a frightened bird's. "To have him suffer for his goodness, his chivalry, is terrible. Do you think his people will blame me very much, Callum?" she broke off, shuddering with a new fear.

Callum regarded her intently for a moment.

"Not if they knew you, mem," was the gallant answer. In her agitation she marked no compliment.

"But they don't," she said, twining her hands, "and they'll think I am just a foolish, selfish girl who sent a brave man to his death. They'll think that and hate me."

"No, mem! they won't," Callum returned, confidently. "They're open to the truth."

"But how are they to know the truth?" she rejoined, glad yet afraid to accept Callum's assurance.

"I will make it my business to tell them," was the answer. "If they are wrong, they'll just be put right again."

"Callum, that will be real good of you," she told him, gratefully.

"Toots, mem!" returned Callum, modestly. "Toots!"

"It will," she repeated; and then, after a pause, "Who is there to tell?"

"His mother and sister, mem," Callum told her. "Fine leddies, too; fine leddies both of them, though it's down in the world they are getting. He is all they have left, poor things, and now——" He checked himself abruptly for a bungler. "But I'll tell them, Miss Pamela, I'll tell them; and maybe ye'll tell them yourself some time, too, and then they'll understand, mem, you were not to blame and couldn't help it."

"If I could only convince them of that!" she cried. "But indeed, Callum, I feel very guilty and miserable."

My Lord Benbreck—Callum's Prayer

"Sometimes," observed Callum, slowly, "when we are least to blame we feel worst. It's a queer thing about human nature, that. I wouldn't be blaming myself too much if I was you, mem."

With the fate of a Chisholm in the scale against her, Callum could pay Pamela no higher compliment than that. He sympathised with her, was sorry for her, resolved, as far as in him lay, to be her advocate and champion with the stricken ones at Kinleath.

She was plunging into further questions, when she was arrested by the sound of footsteps, and turning, half resentfully, beheld young Lord Benbreck, son and heir of Dundalloch, the greatest earl in the North. One of many guests gathered for the shooting (the Dundalloch moors being all let, for financial reasons), he had arrived at the Castle but an hour or two before, and was now, in fact, taking his first walk round. It was known that he enjoyed a special grace at Bruan; whence it was inferred by all the wise people who read signs and omens that in due time he would be named to the world as the winner of the young American heiress whose beauty made all men her thralls, whose fortune ran to figures that were little less than fabulous. Certainly, as he now advanced, smiling, his air was that of one who is perfectly sure both of himself and of the ground he treads.

"Ah! found you at last!" he called, while yet some distance off. "Been looking for you everywhere."

"Oh, Lord Benbreck," was the response, "I'm in such trouble—such trouble! I don't know what to do."

He halted as if struck, and then at a dozen strides was beside her.

"Trouble?" he repeated, an instant solicitude in voice and mien. "Trouble? What can trouble you?"

Faces in the Mist

"You know of that dreadful accident that happened yesterday," she responded. "Well, it appears the victim is a very well-known gentleman of this neighbourhood."

"Great Scot!" he exclaimed, in a concern that matched her own. "Who is it?"

"Mr. Chisholm—Mr. Kenneth Chisholm of Kinleath," she replied. "Of course you know him?"

There was a pause. An immediate change came over Benbreck's face. The concern vanished; in its place came an airy disdain which, light as it was, yet somehow suggested ineffable hate and cruelty.

"No; can't say I do," was the response. "Hadn't that honour. Been found, then? Dead, I suppose?" He spoke as one who might have heard casually of the discovery of a dead dog.

"Not dead," said Pamela, too much turmoiled at heart to notice closely or accurately. "At least, not yet, so far as we know. But he's reported to be dying. I can't tell you how I'm upset."

Benbreck's white teeth showed in a little smile, partly of amusement, partly of reproach. He was of the philosophic, happily-endowed souls who can be cheerfully resigned under the calamities of others.

"You perturb yourself unnecessarily," he told her. "Accidents will happen. What made him go over? He ought to have known better."

"The fog," said Pamela, wretchedly. "No one could have seen an inch ahead in it. It was the thickest, most dismal I ever saw."

"So down he went. Ah, well, can't be helped, I suppose." The white teeth shone in another little smile.

It was fortunate that his lordship did not chance to look at Callum just then. Had he done so, he would have met eyes ablaze with sudden anger. "She doesn't know, but I do," Callum was saying to

My Lord Benbreck—Callum's Prayer

himself. "Some time, maybe, I'll get a chance to tell her, and then——" Visions of a rousing sensation—if the truth must be told, a rousing revenge—thrilled him. You may say that as a servant it was none of his business to thrust his finger into such a pie; that hornets' nests and old stories of hate, oppression, and feud are best let alone. Callum thought differently. For he was a Highlander first and a servant afterwards. So he watched as a weasel watches when all its agile feelings are aflame, committing every word to memory, cherishing every taunt and sneer against the day of reckoning. Might it come soon and be what he would have it!

Benbreck evinced no disposition to pursue the subject. Dead men are not pleasant topics of conversation, and in this case there were elements, secret, but active and much to the point, that made such conversation doubly distasteful.

"They have been looking for you, and I was told off to search," he told Pamela. "Shall we go to them?"

"Yes, yes; of course," she answered, like one in a maze, and moved away, he walking daintily by her side. But half a dozen paces off she turned abruptly. "If you hear anything more, will you please come and tell me at once, Callum?" she said. Her eyes seemed to add, "And do try to find out."

"Yes, mem, to be sure," Callum replied curtly. Something in his face and manner struck her vaguely, but she was in too great a tumult, too closely engaged by her own distracting thoughts, to heed a thing so trivial. As she spoke, Benbreck sucked in his under lip meaningly, but said nothing; and the two went their way through a clump of shrubbery to the Castle.

Callum stared after them with glowing, unwinking eyes till they disappeared. Then the pent-up wrath came in a great heaving pant. "Again!" he said to

Faces in the Mist

himself, "again! The same old story. A Chisholm and a Dundalloch, and the Chisholm always getting the worst of it. Mr. Kenneth dying after going over the Cairn Dhu Craggs for Miss Pamela, and as he lies bruised and broken, Benbreck sailing off with her, colours flying. Is that always to be the way of it?"

The glow in his eyes deepened till it seemed they were the tiny doors of a raging furnace; his lips were drawn hard over clenched teeth, the muscles of his arms tightened as for striking. And then, like the waters of a dam breaking bounds, came the torrential rush of the Celt roused to deadly fury. "You're pleased because you think he's dead," he cried, apostrophising the absent Benbreck. "Didn't I see the light of it in your eye, you son of perdition? But go your ways, black heart; go your ways to do the will of your father which is in hell. Many and many's the sore heart the Dundalloch tribe has made at Kinleath. See if their own will be the blither for it in the end. If him that's dying—him—that's—dying—" A choking lump came into his throat. He swallowed it down, his face twitching in agony. "Mr. Kenneth dying, the last of the Chisholms, the last and the best! Mr. Kenneth dying, my brave, bonnie lad, dying—dying—"

His voice broke, his chin sank on his breast, his shoulders heaved in distress; but next instant like a flash his face was turned skyward, alive with a new energy.

"O Thou who rulest in heaven and earth," he cried in his native Gaelic, "dost Thou remember us no more, that these things happen? Thou wilt not forget Thy promise, Thou wilt not let the innocent perish and the wicked triumph for ever. O Lord, Thou wilt not do that! Have mercy, have mercy! Spare him I would name before Thee! Spare him, Lord, to them who would be thrice broken and desolate

My Lord Benbreck—Callum's Prayer

without him!" He paused to be rid of a sob and get breath.

"Yet in Thy mercy omit not the rod of vengeance to evil-doers, to them that oppress and take the bread of others by fraud and guile. Let Thy hand be heavy upon them, let it be as blight and mildew so that naught they undertake shall prosper; yea, let Thine anger take hold of them like a sudden sickness in the night, till they groan and cry out like a man perishing in his pain! That is my prayer."

His head drooped again; but in a moment he was alert and hearkening. Instantly he was as cool and wary as a hunter close upon his quarry. Stepping quickly aside, he caught a glimpse of a face peeping from behind a tree, and beckoned imperiously.

"Duncan, my man," he called, "ye needn't be hiding yer beauty ahint a tree. Come out, man, come out and let us see ye!" And as Duncan, one of his own boyish assistants, slouched forward in fear and awe, "What will it be now, Duncan, my lad?"

"The mistress wants ye," replied Duncan, sheepishly.

"Ay!" said Callum, gravely. "Just think of that! Well, it's a peety to disappoint her; but Duncan, my lad, I'm that throng with other things, it's likely she'll just have to go on wanting me a little whilie longer. Never mind the why and the wherefore and the what; and ye needn't be letting yer eyes jump out of yer head, either. Ye might want to keek another time, Duncan."

"But what am I to tell her?" asked Duncan, in amazement. He fancied that Callum had suddenly gone "gyte"—entirely lost his senses.

"Anything ye like, Duncan, anything ye like, but the truth," was the brazen reply. "It's for another time, ye understand. Ye have a bonnie wit whiles. I'll trust ye. Only, ye'll not be letting on

Faces in the Mist

ye saw me. It's a mean, mean thing to be spying, Duncan. I didn't think it of you."

"I wasn't spying," returned Duncan. "But, Callum, as sure as death, ye frightened me."

"Toots!" responded Callum, "ye should screw yer courage up a bit. And, Duncan, if I was to come on you unbeknownst at yer devotions, why, look you, I'd be passing by on the other side just like a priest or a Levite, and never let on. By that same token ye'll not be saying a word to anyone of anything ye have seen or heard the now. If there's clyping——"

"There'll be no clyping from me," put in Duncan, earnestly.

Callum smiled benignly.

"That's something like, Duncan; that's something like!" he said, in beaming good-humour. "Now, just be trotting back to your work, and leave me to mines."

He stood waiting until he saw his order obeyed; then, turning away from the Castle, he struck out through the woods with the long, swift strides of a man bent on some great purpose.

CHAPTER VI

BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH

WHEN he returned, haggard of face and dew-drenched to the knees, the sun was well up. Here and there in the vast circle of hills a peak shot through the lazily coiling wreaths of mist and shone as with a cap of gold. Below the rapidly narrowing belts of vapour the sunlight streamed, making the mountain-sides glisten and shimmer as if sown with diamonds and opals ; and, yet lower, the woods rose out of the dewy wilight, gleaming as in joy to meet the new day. In the mystic silence of that matin hour the concourse of waters had the musical boom of distant weirs ; and at intervals a moor-cock rose on whirring wing from his bed in the heather, calling out with a lordly note of defiance or dominion. At such an outbreak on the edge of a morass Callum looked upward.

"Ay, ay, blow yer horn," he remarked. "Blow yer horn while ye may. By this time to-morrow ye'll maybe not be crowing so cruse. There's that getting ready that'll quieten the like of you, I'm thinking. Though as for that," he added, pausing as at the shock of an appalling thought, "which of us, man or bird, knows what will be coming to him ? To-day we're crowing with our pride puffed out like a peacock's ; to-morrow we're lying with our face in the dust. Ye know not what an hour shall bring forth. Here's me. Yesterday at this time, who would think I'd be tramping the bogs and woods on such an errand—such an errand ?"

Sighing, he resumed his walk with a heavy step

Faces in the Mist

and a yet heavier heart, full of thoughts for which he had no utterance.

Though it was but little past daybreak when he reached Bruan, the Castle was already a scene of bustling activity. Sleepy maids were hurriedly kindling fires; men were running to and fro in a poth of excitement, calling to one another, conferring with hasty, jerky speech, getting out guns, ripping open cases of ammunition. At the kennels, some distance off, the dogs made a clamour as if they, too, had some tremendous event on hand. In fact, from the general commotion, you might have fancied that an invasion was imminent, and that brute and human were preparing for the enemy. Slaughter, indeed, was in the wind, but not of invaders. The bustle signified neither siege nor battle; it meant the advent of THE TWELFTH, the day of days to the British sportsman whose *métier* is to kill.

A week before, an item of fashionable intelligence informed an eager world that "Mr. and Mrs. Fairhurst are entertaining a large and distinguished party for the grouse-shooting at Bruan Castle, N.B." The simple "N.B.," minus town or shire, was enough. The sun needs no finger-posts, and was not Mrs. Fairhurst at Bruan! Her reputation was reckoned the most gorgeous that had ever crossed the Atlantic to dazzle and subjugate Europe. Wherever she went, it was as if her name and address were written across the sky in a blaze of gold and gems.

It was Mr. Fairhurst's first experience as a lord of the hills, and his heart was set on record bags. The moor, he told himself encouragingly, was famous even in a land where grouse outvalue men, and bleak hillsides yield revenues far beyond the capacity of the fattest corn and wheat lands. Royalty had shot over it and been graciously pleased to express satisfaction. That fact, indeed, instigated his wife

Between Life and Death

to make Mr. Fairhurst the purchaser, and accounted for a thumping addition to the purchase-price.

His own expectations as a sportsman were moderate ; for more than forty years he had not handled a gun, and then it was an antique musket, rammed with buckshot, for such game as might be picked up on a New England farm.

The ladies of the house were out to see the company and share the buzzing glee. Pamela had the white face and tired eyes of one who has slept ill ; but she tried bravely to fall in with the spirit of gaiety and gladness. Benbreck laughingly suggested she should make one of the party, offering himself to attend to her gun.

"You jest," she returned. "But I can shoot."

"On the wing?" he inquired.

"I have hit on the wing."

"Oh, Pam has brought down wild turkeys and things in Florida," Carew explained. "Biggest gobbler I ever saw fell to her. I've bagged 'em, too. But grouse are different. They say grouse are hard to hit."

"Till you know how," returned Benbreck, smiling upon Pamela.

"Then no doubt it's easy enough," she remarked. "I once heard a darkie preacher explain the creation of the world the same way. 'We couldn't do it, my bredren,' he told us, 'cause we don't know how ; but God did, and there wasn't a hitch.' I suppose the principle is universal."

"Oh! come along!" cried Carew, in a dancing impatience. "The men are out of sight with the dogs and guns. Come!"

With that the party started. Mr. Fairhurst, as a sort of afterthought, calling over his shoulder: "By the way, Pam, we'll expect to hear something of your sick man in the evening."

Faces in the Mist

"I'll try and find out," she called back. "Good luck and good-bye." She waved her hand, pleasantly enjoining them to leave some grouse for another day. Then turning quickly, she took her mother's arm.

"You'll lie down and rest awhile now," she said, with the businesslike air that marked her. "You've been up early, and with one thing and another it's been exciting."

Having bestowed her mother comfortably and got away from the lady guests, she passed by a back-door to the rear of the Castle and sought out Callum, where he was already busy among his beloved flowers and gooseberry bushes. Callum was chief gardener, and Adam in the hey-day of his glory in Eden was not prouder of his handiwork. Woe betide the assistant who suffered a weed to exist or made a mistake in pruning, or digging, or potting.

"Callum, have you heard anything?" was her eager and anxious greeting.

Callum straightened himself, leaned on his spade, and regarded her with disquieting gravity.

"Is it Mr. Kenneth, mem?" he returned. "Yes, I have heard, I was there all the night."

"And the news?" she demanded, breathlessly.

"The news?"

"Not to be called good, Miss Pamela," Callum answered, with a sigh. "Not to be called at all good."

The blood left Pamela's face.

"Don't tell me he's dead!" she cried. "Don't say that, Callum!"

"Oh! no, mem, I will not say that exactly," was the response. "Not dead, not just dead when I left; but as near it as a man can be that has any breath left in him."

"Tell me all you know, Callum," she said, palpitating in an anxiety that made her sick and giddy. "Tell me everything—don't—don't be afraid."

Between Life and Death

"Very well, mem," returned Callum, obediently, "I will. After you went away yesterday with Lord Benbreck, I just said to myself, 'I'll go and see for myself how the poor lad is.' So off I went; couldn't help it, as ye might say. And when I got to Kinleath the first thing I saw was Miss Elsie with her eyes red and her face all wet, poor thing. It seems Mr. Kenneth dragged himself home somehow and then just gave up."

"I saw Mrs. Chisholm too. Her eyes were quite dry, but her face, Miss Pamela, had something worse than tears on it. It was the face of the dead. What am I saying? Yes, fifty times worse. For there is peace on the face of the dead; but hers made your breath stop to look at it. 'How is it, mem?' says I, afraid to ask the question. She rocked herself a bittie from side to side and gave a wee moan. 'It's come, Callum,' says she; 'it's come!' 'What mem?' says I, shivering in my very bones. 'The finishing stroke,' says she. 'I'm done for now, Callum.' 'God's sake, mem,' say I, 'is it like that?' 'Come this way,' says she. 'You're an old friend, Callum, ay, and a true friend, and you love Kenneth.' That's what she said, mem. Well, she took me to his room and told me to look in quietly. The doctor was there by this time; but I got a glisk of Mr. Kenneth's face. It was as white as the snow at Christmas, except where the brown wouldn't come off. His eyes were shut when we looked first, but he opened them, and, seeing his mother, he smiled. Och, och, Miss Pamela, it was like a knife at my heart to see him trying to comfort her. Then he smiled at me, and I had just to turn away."

Callum's eyes filled, but paying no heed to tears, he went on: "Then I looked at Mrs. Chisholm, and only once in all my life before did I see the kind of look she had."

Faces in the Mist

"Yes?" said Pamela, scarcely able to breathe.
"Yes?"

"It was at Edinburgh, long, long ago, when I was young. A woman was tried for killing her child: a poor young thing that didn't know what she was doing; and they found her guilty and sentenced her to death. When it was all going on and this one and that one swearing her life away, she was in such a daze, she didn't seem to know what they were about. But at last she understood, and the look on her face was like the look on Mrs. Chisholm's. I'll mind it to my dying day. She gave one great cry as if her heart was broke and gripped the rail of the dock. Only Mrs. Chisholm didn't say anything. She just looked like one that was sentenced to death and hadn't a word to say for herself."

"Did you see him after that, Callum?"

"No, mem; I went downstairs and sat and waited with my head in my hands, but I didn't see him any more. For he got worse and worse, and took to wandering in his mind. After a while the doctor comes down, and I asked him, 'How is to be with him, doctor?' says I. 'I wish I knew,' says he. 'I wish to God I knew. He's out of his head the now, Callum—talks of seeing a face in the mist, and wants to rise out of his bed and go to it. Keeps on saying there's a leddy lost that he must save.' Then I had to tell him about you, mem. 'Well,' says the doctor, 'he's crying out that he's left her somewhere about those infernal precipices and wants to be up and off to her.' That's what he told me, mem."

There was a tense pause. Pamela clasped and unclasped her hands in a fever of nervous excitement.

"Wanted to save me," she said, and then quickly, as if a fearful thought leaped through her brain,

Between Life and Death

"Did they blame me, Callum?" and held her breath for the answer.

"Not a word, Miss Pamela," was the emphatic answer. "Not one single word."

Pamela trembled with a deep-drawn breath of relief. "Callum," she said, then on a great heave of feeling, "you will take me to Kinleath. I want to—to see things for myself. Do you think they would be offended?"

"Offended!" cried Callum, his face lighting as if kindled to radiance by the morning sun. "Offended! it's glad they will be, Miss Pamela, and not offended at all. Take my word for that."

"I will, Callum, I will. Do you think it's too early to go just yet?"

"They're early risers, mem. In my time they were never long after the sun in being up."

"It's hardly a fashionable hour for making calls; but we'll break the social law for once. Go to the garage, then, Callum, and tell them to get my motor ready immediately—my own, you understand."

"And bring it round to the castle front, mem?" responded Callum, joyfully. "It'll be there in a jiffey."

A minute later Callum was calling in a voice of extreme urgency, "Ho! there, you sleepy-headed Sassenach! Stop snoring and look alive; you're wanted."

A resentful, heavy-eyed cockney confronted him, demanding to be informed what he was "making a row about."

"Something you'll know about mighty quick, if you don't look out," was the reply. "In two minutes exactly from the present time Miss Pamela wants her motor-car, and if she's kept waiting, I'm jalousing it's looking for another chaffoor she'll be. To work, my lad, to work. You can yawn and glower

Faces in the Mist

at me some other time. Eh, but you're a slow lot, you English," he went on, encouragingly. "Must have been for your sins that God made your fingers ali thumbs. There, steady, my lad," as the chaffeur made to go off without him. "Maybe, ye'd like company, and maybe ye wouldn't; but whether or no you're going to have it." With an air of vast importance and deliberation he stepped up and settled himself on the front seat. "Front door," he added, laconically.

"Could guess that for myself," retorted the chauffeur. "Does Miss Pamela want you as well as the motor?"

"Them that waits finds out," was the complacent response. "Drive on."

"Wish I had you in London," remarked the chauffeur, significantly.

"To be sure, and it's kind ye are," Callum returned. "But I'm not for London, which is a wicked, God-forsaken place, they tell me. At my time of life I've other things to think of. There, ye needn't be taking the gateposts with you. Miss Pamela doesn't want them. Besides, Mr. Fairhurst mightn't like it."

At the castle front the chauffeur went to a rear seat, and Pamela took his place at the wheel, with Callum in state by her side. The car was the best that Coventry could produce, a sixty horse-power, with the speed capacity of an express locomotive and the luxurious upholstery of an Atlantic liner. Pamela was a noted motorist, rather too noted for her father's peace of mind. Hardly had they started when a turn of the small wrist swung them into Kinleath Avenue, and next moment they had drawn up before the mansion house. On the way, however, Callum managed to give his young mistress a rapid sketch of the family history, to which she listened without interruption.

Between Life and Death

Alighting, she rang the door-bell herself, and was shown into the drawing-room. A minute later a stately lady of sixty or so entered. She had snow-white hair, a face which, though drawn and stricken now, must once have made her the beauty of a whole shire, and a manner that, for the present, at any rate, was correct and dignified rather than cordial. Her eyes were duplicates of the eyes into which Pamela had looked in the mist above the Cairn Dhu Crag. The resemblance between mother and son was remarkable, in the present situation almost disconcerting.

Both women seemed to feel an awkward constraint but with a little flick to her courage, Pamela said, "I must apologise, Mrs. Chisholm, for intruding at such an hour. My excuse is that I wanted, that we all wanted, the latest news of your son."

She had risen, and the two stood regarding each other with the critical look which is instinctive with women meeting for the first time.

"It is an act of kindness," replied Mrs. Chisholm, courteously. "And that needs no apology at any time. Please be seated."

"I hope he is not so much hurt as was thought at first," said Pamela, sitting down again.

"I wish I could say so," was the answer. "I have been up with him all night. The doctor has set some ribs for him, and done the best for other injuries. He's in a high fever and delirious."

"Oh," said Pamela, with a suppressed emotion quite unusual to her. "I was hoping that I might hear he was better, and perhaps thank him personally," she added with an effort.

"I'm sorry to say that's impossible," Mrs. Chisholm responded. "I wish it were not."

There was an uneasy silence as if neither woman knew what to say next. Then for want of something

Faces in the Mist

better Pamela remarked, "I am exceedingly sorry. It is very unfortunate."

"Very unfortunate," agreed Mrs. Chisholm, sadly. "He was to have gone away this very day. It is hard to say what will happen now. I take it Callum has told you he was very badly hurt, though he managed to crawl home."

"Yes," Pamela replied, all her pulses beating furiously. "Callum told me, and he told me, too, of his admiration and affection for him—for you all."

"Callum was at Kinleath when my son was born, and for many a day after," was the response. "If our fortunes were to-day what they once were he would in all likelihood be here still. I daresay he has told you something of how it has been with us."

"Yes, something," Pamela returned, involuntarily bowing her head.

"But, of course, you cannot understand," said the other, quietly. "Those who are in the sunshine know not what it is to be in the shade. How should they? Besides, you are very young."

"Perhaps you are mistaken as to what I can understand," responded Pamela, quickly. "May I say one thing to you now?"

"Surely, surely, you may say anything."

The manner was perfectly civil, but languid with the languor of profound weariness.

"Then what Callum has told me has filled me with sympathy and admiration," said Pamela, flushing hotly.

"I thank you," returned Mrs. Chisholm, with the courtliness of a sorrowing queen. "But, of course, as to what Callum says, you must remember the devotion of the Gael. In our loyalty as well as in our hate we Highlanders are in very truth a peculiar people, though there are some among us who do the devil's work as shamelessly as any Judas."

Between Life and Death

Somehow Pamela winced. "Callum, at any rate, knows how to be loyal," she said. She meant to say more. But just then the door opened and Miss Chisholm entered. She was a strikingly beautiful girl, very pale at present, with traces of tears still on her face, and grave, as Pamela thought, with the gravity of her brother.

"My daughter," said Mrs. Chisholm simply, by way of introduction. "Miss Fairhurst has come to ask for Kenneth, Elsie. I am sorry we haven't better news for her."

"Yes," said Elsie. "I only wish my brother could thank you himself, Miss Fairhurst."

"I wish I could thank him," returned Pamela fervently. "I sincerely wish I could. I hope he is not in much pain."

"I'm not sure that he feels the pain now. There's a little delirium. Talks of seeing a face in the mist and not being able to save it, and all that. What worried him particularly before the delirium came was that he must overstay his leave and may lose his post."

Pamela's breath began to come very hard and fast.

"Oh, how you must blame me," she cried. "But, indeed—indeed, I couldn't help it."

"My son told me explicitly you were not to blame, Miss Fairhurst," Mrs. Chisholm informed her.

But Pamela's sensitive intelligence was aflame. No matter what Kenneth said, she was sure his mother and sister blamed her. In their place she would herself.

"What does the doctor say?" she asked.

"That with care he may recover," Elsie answered.

A great sigh of gratitude and gladness came from Pamela, but the next moment a fresh terror thrilled through her.

"If he lost his post?" she asked. "What then?"

Faces in the Mist

"Then," replied Mrs. Chisholm, "that would be one more dire stroke of misfortune for his father's house."

Pamela rose quivering, a fiery resolution swelling in her heart. Whatever happened, Kenneth Chisholm must not suffer on her account.

CHAPTER VII

THE CAIRN DHU CRAGS AGAIN

MRS. FAIRHURST, dozing under an awning with an open book in her lap, was surprised into alertness by the voice of Pamela. Mrs. Fairhurst took literature as a sedative with such excellent effect that almost every afternoon she enjoyed the sweetest slumber over a novel or a work of devotion, preferably the latter. Hence she reckoned authors more than physicians, and almost as much as millionaires, the benefactors of mankind.

"Whatever's up now, Pam?" she asked, pretending to have been wide awake over her book.

"Why, where in the world are you going?"

Pamela was dressed in hill costume, and carried a stout walking stick as a sort of miniature alpenstock. She had an air of energy and activity moreover that was strangely at variance with the languorous afternoon and the general mood of inertia of all at Bruan Castle.

"To the Cairn Dhu Craggs for a stroll," she answered. "I want to get off by myself for a little while. Our guests are all right; I have seen to them."

Mrs. Fairhurst sat up as if a galvanic battery were suddenly applied behind. "The Cairn Dhu Craggs," she repeated. "What do you mean, child? I thought you'd had enough of the Cairn Dhu Craggs."

"Want to see them in daylight and at leisure," Pamela returned. "Besides, it's a lovely day, and there's nothing else to be done. May join the shooters on their way home."

Faces in the Mist

"Once before you went out for a stroll by yourself on a lovely day and you know what happened," was the retort. "No, you mustn't go to that dreadful place alone. Don't press, please."

"Will you come with me, then, mother?" Pamela asked innocently.

"I go with you," cried Mrs. Fairhurst in pure horror at the idea. To her mind, the bare suggestion that she, one of the smartest, which is to say, one of the richest women alive, should pant and perspire up a barbarous hillside was no better than sacrilege, blasphemy of the worst sort against the great god mammon. Mrs. Fairhurst flattered herself she appreciated the privilege of riches.

"No," she added, "most decidedly I won't go with you, and it appears to me that the experience you have already had up there——" she waved her hand comprehensively hillward, "ought in all conscience to satisfy you."

"Some one has said that experiences are really the only things worth having in a rather imperfect world," observed Pamela.

"What fool was that?" asked Mrs. Fairhurst bluntly.

Mother and daughter looked at each other, the one critically and searchingly, the other, as it seemed, with unconcerned ease and frankness.

"Folly is often mere point of view," said Pamela, sagely. "Wisdom has many facets, and, so far as I can make out, the mortal hasn't been born yet who has been able to run a corner in it."

"Why, Pam, what's got into your head, now?" demanded Mrs. Fairhurst. "Have you been reading some stuff or nonsense, or has anybody been sanding your eyes? As for the Cairn Dhu Crags, I wish you had never gone near them. They're evidently as barbarous and ugly as their name. I'm going to ask

The Cairn Dhu Crag Again

your father to have them blown out of existence. Already there's one unfortunate man more or less on our hands. We don't want——"

"He isn't, mother," put in Pamela, quietly. "We shouldn't have heard a word of the accident from anyone at Kinleath if we hadn't inquired."

"Ah," said Mrs. Fairhurst, like a distressed mariner clutching at a spar. "You called. How did they strike you?"

"Splendidly," replied Pamela, with conviction. "Splendidly. Very proud, I should say."

Mrs. Fairhurst arched her eyebrows as though to indicate there was no limit to the pretensions and absurdities of some people. "Indeed, I understood they were very poor!"

"I think they are."

Mrs. Fairhurst opened her eyes in wonder. "Then what in the world are they proud about?" she inquired. In her opinion there was but one thing in all the universe that justified pride—money or what money implies.

"Mother," responded Pamela, flushing unaccountably, "may not poor people have cause for pride?"

"Don't see why," was the prompt response. "No, upon my word, I don't see why."

"The Chisholms are a very old family," Pamela explained. "You know what that means in this country."

"Yes, I know," her mother returned. "It generally means pinching and screwing—what is called genteel poverty. In fact, it means that a dime has to do the work of a dollar. There's no cause for pride in that that I can see; and I want you to understand right here, Pam, that we're not at Bruan Castle exactly for the benefit of the poor—no, we don't want to take up with poor people in any shape or way."

Faces in the Mist

"They say Lord Benbreck needs money pretty badly," said Pamela.

"That's different," rejoined her mother, impatiently; "that's altogether different. Look up Burke, and you'll find his family has some reason to hold its head high. Guess there's no mention of the Chisholms of Kinleath. Lord Benbreck is heir to one of the finest titles in the land. His family came in with William the Conqueror, or somewhere round there, I reckon; and a title of that standing is a mighty good sort of thing to have. If he was in New York you know what would happen."

"Yes, hundreds of the smartest girls in the States would be throwing themselves at his head, or perhaps more correctly, at his feet. He wouldn't even have to whistle to bring them. Not much pride there."

"Pam, whatever's the matter with you that you're so ridiculous?" Mrs. Fairhurst demanded severely.

"Lord Benbreck is a —."

"Lord," put in Pamela, mischievously. "Well, Mr. Chisholm's a gentleman; and they say that is God's own masterpiece. Nothing better has been made. As for his mother, she is perfectly lovely. I haven't quite made up my mind about his sister. But you have headed me off my subject. I may go to the Cairn Dhu Crag?"

"Alone! Certainly not," was the emphatic reply.

"I simply won't hear of it."

"Then I'll take Callum," said Pamela, composedly.

"He's a safe guide, anyway."

She had her way as usual. Callum, nowise loth to forsake even his dearly-beloved garden for such an enterprise, was minutely instructed in his duty by Mrs. Fairhurst. Then she turned to Pamela. "Now, no risks," she enjoined. "You're not to go anywhere, or do anything, that Callum may think in the least

The Cairn Dhu Crag Again

dangerous. We want no more tragic incidents, if you please."

"Don't worry, mother dear," was the gay response. "I will obey Callum implicitly till he delivers me back into your hands. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," returned Mrs. Fairhurst with a quiver of the conscience. Only her weakness prevented her from putting her foot down and forbidding the expedition.

Precisely why she wished to visit the scene of disaster, Pamela could not explain even to herself. A nameless longing, a subtle fascination which she did not understand, drew her thither, and she yielded, feeling in some measure as one going with the stream to things unknown. In truth, so she was.

Arrived before the great, grey Crag, massed in the grim indifference of everlasting strength, a vague feeling of awe possessed her. She was not easily awed. America disdains awe; and she was American to the core. Ordinarily she would have passed the place with a trite remark about its loneliness, its savage grandeur, and what not. But now it had haunting associations, was charged with sentiments that blended inexplicably with her most private thoughts. Once again she saw the grave eyes in the mist. Then a huddled figure, lying cruelly bruised at the foot of those terrible rocks, made her imagination shudder. Would that she had been permitted to rescue it, to minister to it, to do something in appreciation of chivalry. She was recalled by Callum, who was describing the manner of Kenneth's fall like a detective reconstructing the incidents in a sensational crime.

Poising himself on a rock whence he had a full view of the cliffs, he described in detail how the blindfolded man must have gone headlong, with a vividness that Pamela found strangely electric.

Faces in the Mist

"Ye see that brow above there, mem," he said, pointing to the beetling summit of a cliff; "he must have stepped over just there, and come tumbling and bumping down here. This," indicating a broad ledge or narrow platform, tilted outward, "broke his fall a bit; but of course he rolled over, and och—och! he had far to go after that, the poor lad. See, there's a bush torn out by the root. He took it with him, belike, and that's what saved his life. But it's little wonder that it's sore and bruised and broken he is."

"Little wonder, indeed, Callum," agreed Pamela, her eyes moist with pity and fear.

She looked up again at the overhanging edge of the cliff, then slowly down the jutting, jagged front, noting with an inward shiver where Kenneth must have struck and clutched. All at once her eye caught something on an iron point midway down, a tiny rag of cloth fluttering almost imperceptibly in the wind.

"See, see, Callum," she cried, in a sough of excitement, pointing upward. Callum, scrambling in flagrant disobedience of orders, climbed a near rock, reaching thence desperately with the crook of his shepherd's staff.

"A bittie from his coat, as I'm a living man," he announced downward. "*Dhia gleidh sinn*, God keep us, but the wonder's on me he ever got off with a whole bone left in him." But Pamela was impatient to have it.

"Throw it down," she called; "throw it down."

She caught it before it could touch earth, regarded it a moment with shining eyes, and then folding it quickly, slipped it through the opening in her glove. In a moment Callum was beside her, more eloquent than ever over the terrible fall and the miraculous escape of Kenneth.

"The Chisholms had always nine lives for as little

The Cairn Dhu Crag Again

as is left of them at the end," he said. "If it wasn't for that it's lying in Kinleath kirkyard my bonnie lad would be the now."

In that instant a heavy cloud crossed the sun's face, casting a sudden gloom on the Cairn Dhu Crag. Pamela looked at them, her blood cold with a sense of their sheer cruelty.

"Come, Callum," she said, turning to go, "let us get away from this place; it is dreadful."

"As you like, mem," Callum returned submissively, though he had still much to say. "As you like. Dreadful is the word, Miss Pamela; and Kenneth Chisholm is the only man that ever did what he did and came out of it alive."

THEY went
grouse-shooter
a little their v
to tuft of a h
bloom was a
bees. Then t
on a flat, mo
heart's delight

For a full
Chisholm, and
told his tale
Pamela listene
nods, question
fire, thrilled b
the chequered
the breath of
they had held
land, honour
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hall without t
courts and retu
One of them fig
ran his man th
declared that
feat than ador
" The other
" but Chisholm
gunpowder yot

CHAPTER VIII

HERO WORSHIP

HEY went slowly towards the path which the
se-shooters would take in returning home. For
tle their way lay through peat haggs, or from tuft
uft of a half-dried morass; but soon the heather-
m was about them, humming and alive with
. Then to pass the time they seated themselves
a flat, moss-covered boulder, and Callum got his
t's delight.

or a full hour he played Homer to the House of
holm, and never one of the whole race of bards
his tale with a finer, more infectious ardour.
ela listened, a willing thrall, encouraging him with
, questions, smiles and bright eyes, feeling his
thrilled by his graphic speed. His idols enjoyed
chequered history which is the stuff of romance,
breath of life to adventure. In bygone times
had held their heads high among the best in the
honoured where honour is choicest. They
ed, they fought, they revelled, they kept open
without thought of the reckoning, went to kings'
s and returned none the better for the experience.
of them figured in a duel under a prince's eye, and
his man through so prettily that his royal highness
red that he would rather be the hero of such a
than adorn a throne.

"The other man was for pistols," Callum explained;
Chisholm knew better. 'Is it dirty lead and
powder you're proposing?' says he. 'Tut, tut,

Hero Worship

let us stick to the good clean steel; it's m
in the end.' That was his way of jo

In the exile that followed, despite a
supplies never failed from the old
adventures of the go-betweens were mar

"They said he'd never see heather
door again," Callum proceeded, his
"but they didn't know the Chisholm
back sure enough, and the whole cou
out with pipes and shouting to meet l
died, too, like a decent, respectable m
bed."

"What was the cause of the d
Pamela asked, curiously.

"What, Miss Pamela, but the u
woman?"

"Oh."

"Yes, indeed, mem. They say sh
and maybe not worth fighting for. Bu
Chisholm's way to stop and think
day a thing in ruffles, it was a good v
something about her that kitted up r
blood. The next of it was him wi
and the business done. His name
There's always been a Kenneth in th
never a better than him that be
now."

Gallant tastes are costly. Sometime
profited cannily by the Chisholm spi
the wolf in the garments of the Samari
afar. But whether the lender was ho
his rate was ever the Hebrew rate of
by piece the Chisholm possessions we
remnant remained. At that bit o
Callum stopped, looking curiously at his

"Why are you looking like that,
asked, colouring foolishly.

Faces in the Mist

"I am wondering, Miss Pamela," Callum replied, slowly.

"What are you wondering about?"

"Oh! if I might go on; if ye'd like the thing just as a story or if ye'd be for the truth."

"The truth, certainly, Callum. Why should you hesitate? Is there anything to hide? Have the Chisholms ever done anything disgraceful?"

"Disgraceful," repeated Callum, in rare scorn. "A Chisholm do anything disgraceful! Never, Miss Pamela; never from the day God made the first of them to the day when the last of them went headlong over the Cairn Dhu Craggs yonder."

"Then why are you mysterious? Why don't you go straight ahead?"

"There's maybe things you wouldn't like to hear, mem," Callum answered, with a shrewd look.

"I think I can stand the truth, Callum. Please let me have it."

"Very well, mem. Only you'll not be angry with old Callum when he has told you. Ye know the Earl of Dundalloch?"

"Lord Benbreck's father?"

"The very man; Lord Benbreck's father. Once there was an Earl of Dundalloch that was awful fond of shogging yont."

"Good gracious! what's that, Callum?"

"Laying his hands on what didn't belong to him. It's a fashion some people have. Well, he began to take a great fancy to a bit of land here and a bit of land there, always the best, belonging to the Chisholms. And never a bit of land he took a liking to but one way or another he got it in the end."

"Did he buy it?"

"As the Macgregors of Glengyle over by here used to buy their cattle, lift and go. Only the law was always on his side, by his way of it. He was the

Hero Worship

most extrorinar man for getting pretexts and excuses, and, between one pretext and another, what once belonged to the Chisholms in course of time belonged to the Dundallochs."

Pamela compressed her lips with a remarkable effect of grimness.

"Now," said Callum, "you're angry with me. Ye see, mem, the truth's not always as sweet as jam."

She attempted to laugh, assured him she was not angry, and begged him to proceed.

"Very well, mem," Callum went on obediently. "When Mr. Chisholm died, him that I was brought up with, he left three sons and a daughter, with a widow to do as best she could. She had a wee pickle of her own by good luck, though it was her bonnie face that made her mistress of Kinleath."

"She must have been very beautiful," said Pamela with conviction.

"I danced at her wedding, mem," returned Callum. "And if any man told me there ever was a bonnier bride, why look you, old as I am, I would ask him to prove it to me in the way of a gentleman."

"You mentioned this morning that she lost two of her sons," said Pamela, softly. "What became of them, Callum—I mean how did they die?"

"Like Chisholms, mem, like Chisholms—fighting. Next time you're at Kinleath ask them to let you see something they keep in a little silver box by itself. It's only a bittie bronze made in the shape of a cross—Maltese, I think they call it—hanging to a finger-length of red ribbon. But there's two words marked on it that make them gey and proud: 'For Valour.' That was Mr. Archie's. He never set eyes on it, poor lad; so it was sent to his mother."

"What was it given for?" asked Pamela, tingling strangely.

"'For conspicuous bravery under fire,'" replied

Faces in the Mist

Callum, quoting from the official record. "Saving his colonel's life and losing his own, poor lad; though he didn't die just at once. He lies far away by the pyramids of Egypt, near the River Nile. Ye'll maybe have been there, Miss Pamela?"

"Yes, I have been there."

"Did ye see his grave?" asked Callum, with sudden intensity.

"No, Callum, I cannot say I saw it."

"I was thinking maybe you did," said Callum in manifest disappointment. "There's them I ken would walk a weary way just to look at it. Ah well! he'll sleep sound enough, I'm thinking, though we're not near him; and some day he'll rise up and leave his bed and we'll all meet again. The good Book promises it." He paused a moment to control a tremor of the voice, and then went on: "It'll be a grand—grand meeting, I'm thinking. Whiles I get fain thinking of it. Then there was Mr. Jamie. He lies by the Modder River; and that's further away, they tell me, than the Nile. His mother didn't want him to be a soldier, but he would. So he went away and never came back."

"And is Mr. Chisholm a soldier also?" asked Pamela.

"Is it Mr. Kenneth? No, mem; he's an engineer, and one of the best, too, they say. And if I was to tell you my mind on it, Miss Pamela, it would be this: that I loved Archie and I loved Jamie—finer lads never wore tartan; but I love Mr. Kenneth more than the two of them put together. I have carried him in my plaid and on my shoulder hundreds of times when the wee tot couldn't very well carry himself. I have seen him growing up into a fine, big man; and it's God's truth, Miss Pamela, that if my life was any use to him or his, they'd have it this very day, and welcome."

Pamela pretended not to see the moist gleam in

Hero Worship

Callum's eye. She thought of the qualities which could inspire such affection, such devotion, in an old, discarded servant. She thought, too, of Dundalloch's "shogging yont" and the injustice and tyranny it implied.

"Losh, yon's the hill folk," Callum cried all at once. "You'll be wanting to go down with them, Miss Pamela."

"No," she answered, slipping to the ground from her moss-covered sun-bathed seat. "No, let us go by ourselves, Callum, and quick, quick, lest they see us."

She could not endure to talk to Lord Benbreck so soon after hearing Callum's story.

CHAPTER IX

THE TRIUMPH OF YOUTH

EVERY night Callum was at Kinleath, and every morning he hastened back with the latest intelligence to Bruan. For nearly a week his head hung in gloom and he spoke in sighs and monosyllables. The doctor said little, but looked troubled, and Callum, quick to interpret omens, inferred the worst. At heart as fatalistic as any ancient Greek, he saw in the catastrophe to Kenneth a spiteful fate making fell sport with an unfortunate house. When that house was crushed, when the sod lay on the brave young head, he supposed her wanton, witch-like cruelty would seize another victim. Let it seize on. He would be past caring.

But youth and a determined resolution to live work miracles. Of a sudden Callum began to smile again, to look cheerfully at earth and sky, even to crack jokes with reprehensible flippancy. Pamela noted the change with a secret, trembling joy.

"You have good news, Callum," she cried, one morning, as he came to make his report, his tanned, furrowed face rivalling the sun in brightness. "Mr. Chisholm is better?"

"Better, mem," responded Callum. "Glory be to God he's going to pull through, that's what he's going to do, Miss Pamela."

A wild smothering sensation came upon Pamela, but she managed to ask: "Does the doctor say so?"

"Ay, mem, the doctor says it, and what's more, Mr. Kenneth looks it. I was with him for nearly

The Triumph of Youth

an hour last night. Not that he'll be for running a race just yet ; but he's round the corner and getting out of the wood. Young bones mend quickly. Pure blood, the doctor said ; no whisky to make wounds fester. He'll be up and out in no time."

"You're glad, Callum," said Pamela, shivering in the very intensity of her own gladness.

"Glad !" repeated Callum. "'Deed, mem, and glad's not the word for it at all. For as sure as death, Miss Pamela, if it wasn't that folk would think me clean daft I could dance to my own fiddling like King David of old ; that's what I could do."

Pamela smiled. She understood. But for the restraints of convention she, too, could have danced. She did the next best thing : as soon as the hour made it possible she verified the news for herself.

Again she was received by Mrs. Chisholm ; but this time in spite of a wistful haunting sadness that seemed habitual, the beautiful face was almost happy in expression. The meeting was difficult for both ; but they looked into each other's eyes, read what was there written, and were friends on the instant. As Kenneth was not yet permitted to see visitors they sat down together murmuring their mutual hopes and happiness. Then very delicately and tenderly Pamela harked back to the story Callum told her.

"It's splendid," she declared. "I tingled like anything as he described to me the bravery of your sons."

"Brave you may well call them," returned Mrs. Chisholm, proudly. "Though, indeed, it's little their bravery profited themselves or me. Two of them went away young and strong and full of ardour ; and never came back. And as they won't come to me any more I must just wait patiently till I can go to them."

Faces in the Mist

But Pamela was in no mood for sadness.

"You're to be envied, Mrs. Chisholm," she said, with the thrill of subdued passion. "In your place a Spartan mother would have been proud."

"Perhaps," was the slow reply. "People speak of the glory and all that. But what I think of, Miss Fairhurst, are two far-off graves I would fain see, but cannot. Glory, so far as I can make out, is but poor balm for a mother's heart. Some day perhaps you'll understand."

"I understand now," returned Pamela, so warmly yet with such sympathy and tenderness that Mrs. Chisholm was charmed and uplifted. She liked this eager, warm-hearted young stranger, and for the rest was little disposed to let past calamities overshadow present felicity.

Elsie joined them for a minute and the flood of happiness flowed afresh. When presently Pamela rose to go it was under a promise to return soon; and that promise was kept to the letter. This time Elsie received her.

"My brother is allowed to see one or two special friends," she was told. "I wonder——"

"If I'd care to be one of the privileged few," put in Pamela, "would he mind, do you think?"

"Would you?" was the smiling reply.

Pamela was no longer in any doubt about his sister. Together the two went up the wide staircase, drawn together by some ineffable attraction. Then Miss Chisholm, pushing open a door, said cheerfully, "Miss Fairhurst, mother."

Rising from a chair by the bedside Mrs. Chisholm greeted her visitor with a courtesy at once stately and cordial.

"You must excuse us, Miss Fairhurst," she said, in a voice that went straight to Pamela's heart. "Since the doctor gave us leave we have practically

The Triumph of Youth

made my son's bedroom our drawing-room. He likes to have us with him."

"It is I who ought to apologise for intruding," Pamela returned, a pretty glow of colour suffusing her face. "It doesn't seem fair."

Her eyes travelled onward to the invalid and a rosier hue overspread cheek and brow. He lay on a great mahogany four-poster under a canopy that suggested the roof of a tabernacle. Pillows and cushions were piled about him, and the snowy sheets fell away revealing a throat, still brown from long exposure to a tropical sun.

"No need of an introduction, I think," said Mrs. Chisholm, glancing from one to the other.

"We've met before," Pamela observed, the blood mounting still more hotly to her face.

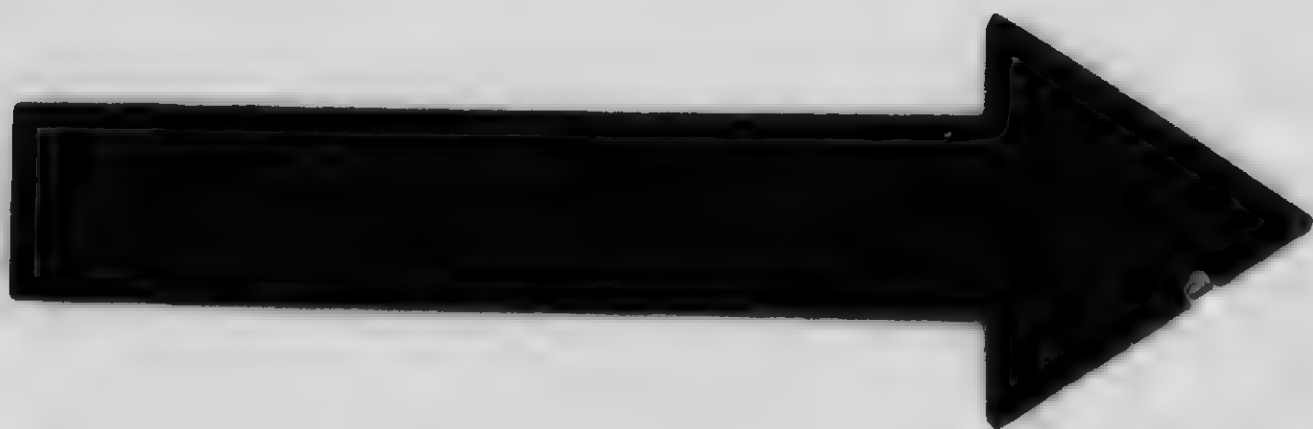
"And parted quite unconventionally," Kenneth remarked in turn. "I thank you for your interest in one who had not even the gumption to take care of himself."

"If you had cared for yourself only, there would be no need to tell me that," Pamela returned, her eyes eloquent of appreciation. She advanced a step hesitatingly and he held out a hand, the left, apologising for the informality.

Pamela took it, murmuring her regrets and sympathy. Then a chair of the same antique style as the canopied four-poster was pushed forward and she sat down face to face for the second time with her mysterious knight. Her heart was beating so wildly that in spite of an excellent nerve, she had some difficulty in maintaining her composure.

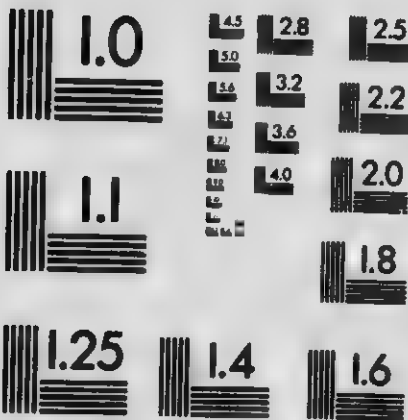
"Are you very much disgusted with me?" she asked, with a timidity not at all characteristic of the Pamela Fairhurst known to her friends.

"Disgusted," he repeated, with remarkable vigour for a sorely maimed man. "Why in the name of



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Faces in the Mist

common-sense should I be disgusted, Miss Fairhurst ? ”

“ Oh ! for several things,” Pamela replied, vaguely. “ If I hadn’t gone wandering by myself in a strange land and got lost in the fog and you hadn’t found me and been chivalrous to your own hurt and all that, things would be different, wouldn’t they ? ”

“ You are pleased to indulge a pious supposition,” he answered. There was a flush on his deeply-tanned face, his eyes seemed to say he would really be exceedingly sorry if things were different, that in fact a fall over a cliff was light payment for the pleasure he enjoyed.

“ We have a saying in the Highlands here, Miss Fairhurst,” said Mrs. Chisholm, quietly, “ that what must be will be. My son had to fall over the Cairn Dhu Crag.”

“ Fatalists, you see,” remarked the invalid, blithely.

“ Well, it’s something of a feat to go headlong over the Cairn Dhu Crag and live,” observed Elsie. “ So far as I know it has never been done before.”

“ A feat that gives little ground for pride,” responded Kenneth, quickly. “ I must really have been extraordinarily stupid.”

On Pamela’s eager, intent face there was a ravishing glow. The American complexion has been a theme of ridicule to the irreverent. It has been likened to ochre, to badly-tanned leather, and to other things of doubtful beauty ; but Elsie, a connoisseur in such delicate matters, thought she had never seen any woman look lovelier than their visitor did then.

“ I don’t want to be rude,” Pamela said, with a bewitching smile. “ But I must demur there. The fog was the worst I ever saw in my life. It was absolutely bewildering, stupefying. For myself I could not tell East from West, or North from South. As

The Triumph of Youth

to seeing, talk not of blindness till you have had such an experience."

"I am afraid such experiences will make you hate our poor misty, drizzly old Scotland," said Elsie.

"I love it," returned Pamela, with what might appear superfluous warmth. "At first I didn't like it the least little bit and wanted to pack and fly. The idea of being set down in the midst of a desolation of hills and rocks and woods was simply unbearable. I wondered what sin I was expiating by banishment to such a wilderness. But that was only ignorance or prejudice or a combination of both."

"Now you know better," remarked Mrs. Chisholm, in evident pleasure. "By-and-by you will understand, perhaps, why we Highlanders love our wilderness, with all its bleakness and greyness, its mists and rocks, its foaming waters, its bracken and its heather. They mean home to us. We're an odd, odd people, we Celts, for even the Cairn Dhu Craggs make their mystic appeal to us."

"More forcible than mystic sometimes, mother," interjected Kenneth, merrily. She smiled on him indulgently and proceeded:

"The truth is, Miss Fairhurst, we have the heather and the peat in our blood. With our first breath we absorb their perfume, their essence, if you like it so, or rather we are born with it and it remains with us to the end. And when at last we lie down to take our long, long rest, we like to think of the bens we love keeping guard over our sleep."

"I verily believe, Miss Fairhurst," said Kenneth, laughingly, "that in her heart of hearts my mother is convinced the Garden of Eden must have been somewhere just about where we are now."

"And that beyond all doubt the language of Paradise was Gaelic," put in Elsie.

"Nothing has ever been proved to the contrary

Faces in the Mist

that I know of," retorted Mrs. Chisholm, good-humouredly.

"We must be careful there, mother," said Kenneth, with affected gravity. "One of our Highland divines has given the most patriotic reason for not making too much of the language theory. His argument is that if we do scoffers may say the devil himself was Highlandman, and so cast an everlasting slur on respectable people."

There was a general laugh. Pamela, fearing to overtax the patient's strength, rose to go. But in the same instant Mrs. Chisholm put out a gracious hand.

"Miss Fairhurst," she smiled, as if divining what was in Pamela's mind, "you are not going to run away. Kenneth's stronger than he looks. Tea will be here in a minute. Please be seated."

"But I meant only to call and run," said Pamela, doubtfully. Nevertheless, with an instinctive glance at the invalid, she fell back softly into her chair.

CHAPTER X

A VISION OF SPLENDOUR

WHAT are riches for, if not for display? To signalise her advent among territorial grandees and leaders of fashion, Mrs. Fairhurst resolved upon such an entertainment as should mark an epoch, and triumphantly justify her ambitions as the first hostess of the age. Her principle being to do in Rome after the fashion of the Romans, the scheme of glory was wholly Celtic, except in cost and magnificence, which were out-and-out American.

"Never mind the expense," she told her assistants and advisers. "I want this thing to be just so, you understand." Which being interpreted means that it was to be as lavish as invention, knowledge, and a fathomless purse could make it. When the artists and experts engaged to exploit history and archæology finished their work, Mrs. Fairhurst viewed the result with undisguised elation.

"Think it'll astonish some big folk, Rube?" she remarked to her husband, as she conducted him round for a final survey.

"Strike 'em all of a heap, I reckon, Susannah," returned Mr. Fairhurst, who, in spite of aristocratic associations and boundless wealth, occasionally allowed himself the pleasures of a democratic freedom of speech. "Seems like a museum of antiquities."

"So it is," cried Mrs. Fairhurst, jubilantly. "So it is, Rube. I haven't engineered this thing for nothing. You bet I haven't. I've had the British Museum and most other museums ransacked for ideas and

Faces in the Mist

material. Men have read piles and piles of books for me, getting out information and tabulating it. Besides, they have been through pretty well every existing collection of ancient weapons, armour and dress, and I have bought what was procurable, or what struck me. It'll all come in useful in our new position. But you'll have to help out my pocket-money, Rube. It comes rather expensive setting up as landed magnates in the Highlands—more expensive, I must own, than I thought."

Mr. Fairhurst screwed his face a little doubtfully. "Was it worth while collecting all this old truck, Susannah?" he asked.

"Truck!" repeated Mrs. Fairhurst, aghast at the profanity. "What are you thinking of, Rube? It was worth while having everything historically correct. Perhaps you have observed that nearly all big people have ancient collections of one sort or another."

"So!" assented Mr. Fairhurst. "But they're mostly in the family portrait line, I reckon. What are you going to do about ancestors, Susannah? We haven't bought any of 'em yet, have we?"

"All in good time," answered Mrs. Fairhurst. "We can't do everything at once. Rome wasn't built in a day. The ancestors haven't been forgotten. I'm on the look-out for a good tony lot."

"Reckon you'll require all your resource, Susannah," chuckled Mr. Fairhurst. "I'm not sure I could tell who my grandfather was, and a long pedigree is about the highest family asset over here."

"Leave it to me, Rube," said Mrs. Fairhurst, purposefully. "The pedigree will be attended to all right. Let us consider this now. Well, as that man from London says—I forget his name——"

"Perhaps you remember his fee," suggested Mr. Fairhurst.

A Vision of Splendour

"Rube, don't you go and make yourself ridiculous," was the retort. "It's easier than you might think. Well, the man from London said that we have here ne thousand years of Highland history brought before our eyes."

"Sort of general resurrection," remarked Mr. Fairhurst. "I'm not much on antiquities, but it all seems queer and antiquated enough. Got anything from the Ark, any relic of Noah and his family? My, what mighty swells they'd be reckoned now!"

"You'll make me annoyed with you, Rube," observed Mrs. Fairhurst, sweetly.

"I thought there might, at least, be a bit of wreckage recovered from the Flood," persisted Mr. Fairhurst, with a long pull at his cigar. "Reckon they didn't realise their opportunities in the times that succeeded Noah."

But Mrs. Fairhurst was not to be drawn into frivolities. "As I was saying," she went on, "having got all the available information, we began the work of construction. It's in construction that the art of the thing lies. The London man—I'll remember his name by-and-by—put it about right when he said that we evolved cosmos out of chaos, and that now we have produced a microcosm of the Highlands for ten centuries."

"Sounds a bit high-falutin, don't it?" observed Mr. Fairhurst, who did not know a microcosm from a solar eclipse.

"I'm giving you the man's words, Rube," his wife explained. "He knows I wanted to provide a genuine surprise."

"And, by gosh! you've gone and done it, Susannah. Anyone beholding this show for the first time will be surprised right enough. You watch 'em stare and gape. It'll be as good as a testimonial to your cleverness."

Faces in the Mist

"Must have some originality," responded Mrs. Fairhurst, modestly. "Anyway, it'll show the folks round here what can be done."

She considered British Society woefully deficient in ideas. Even its wickedness, to her mind, was stodgy, and its pleasures hopelessly commonplace.

"Now, having got so far, we must go a step further, Rube," she pursued, complacently. "Having got up all this, our next duty is to fit ourselves into it—do our parts, you understand. Naturally, you'll do the Highland chieftain business. I have thought it all out, and the seventeenth century seems the most suitable period for you."

"Why?" asked Mr. Fairhurst, to whom one period was precisely as another.

"Because it's the most imposing and picturesque," was the encouraging reply. "Because, as Mr. What's-his-name said, it combines the old and the new, the feudal and the up-to-date. See here."

She opened a ponderous folio of engravings, and pointed to a Highland chief in full array, *breacan feile* or belted plaid, targe, dirk, claymore, hose, bonnet and feather complete. "There you are!" she said triumphantly.

"Great Scot!" cried Mr. Fairhurst, with a glance at the portrait. "I hope not. If that's me, I shoot myself right away. The half-clad savage and cut-throat! why, he looks an absolute brigand, and, I reckon, was one, too, when attending to his chosen business. Better leave me out of your collection of antiquities, Susannah."

"Rube," was the severe retort, "are you going to cut up rough and spoil everything? Do you understand all that depends on this? Or are you under the impression we crossed the Atlantic for our health?"

"Hardly, Susannah, hardly. Don't have the

A Vision of Splendour

chance. I've become a sort of cinematograph figure, always dancing on some new rope. Before I've found my feet in one position I'm whisked off to another. It makes me giddy, and that's a fact. However, as it's all part of the show, I don't complain. I used to think it was hard to make money, but I'm finding now that it's a sight harder to spend it. I'll do my best, Susannah, but I don't contract for bare legs and short frocks. Whew! I'd die of shame and cold."

"Do others die of shame and cold?" rejoined Mrs. Fairhurst. "Guess legs don't shrivel and curl up by being looked at. Don't be silly, Rube."

With great cogency she pointed out that dukes, earls, princes, and even true-blue monarchs are proud to disport their august legs in kilts, and desired to know if the delight of kings was not good enough even for an American millionaire.

"Besides," she added clinchingly, "you're a Highland chief anyway, Rube. No use squirming. You can't get away from that."

After that argument was futile. For a little while, indeed, Mr. Fairhurst continued to protest, but it was contending against fate in the shape of a resolute wife, and of all contentions that is the most hopeless. On the great night, therefore, he appeared, metamorphosed out of recognition, woefully uncomfortable, but docile and Spartan-like in his endurance of the ordeal. Mrs. Fairhurst, looking him over before the first act, guessed he would do.

"Only, when you're leading out the Duchess, for goodness' sake be careful," she cautioned.

Mr. Fairhurst glanced shyly down at his uncovered knees, which appeared unseemly in their naked prominence.

"I've taken lessons in the blessed thing, as you recommended, Susannah," he said, humbly.

Faces in the Mist

"And can get through a reel without collisions or catastrophes?" she inquired.

"That would perhaps be too much for a mere stranger to expect," he responded. "Highland dances are weird and fearful inventions, but I guess I'll worry through somehow."

"Rube," his wife implored, "don't talk of worrying through. It makes my blood run cold to hear you. For weeks I've been in a raging fever over this thing. If it went on much longer I'd be a broken-down wreck. Mind, you're not expected to do a Highland fling on your partner's toes, or a Strathspey in the tangles of her train."

"I'll try to remember, Susannah, though if a man gets off his head and breaks loose, it's mighty hard to say what might happen. Only, don't you get any more raging fevers. If I keep sane, you won't find me skipping riotously in this rig-out, you bet. I'd be afraid of exhibiting too much of myself."

"Finest suit of clothes you ever wore in your life!" she returned, looking him over again, from his plumed bonnet to his buckled and glittering shoes.

"Costliest, anyway, I guess," he remarked. "Never was so much gold-decked and silver-mounted before, that I can remember."

"You're just right," his wife told him encouragingly. "Oh, you're a Highland chief all right, Rube."

"Feel as if I was coming out of a dime museum," he rejoined, a trifle dolefully!

"Pooh!" she declared, bracingly. "All the dime museums in the world couldn't buy you up."

He was further encouraged by the fact that the guests, from his Grace the Duke of Invercowrie down, similarly exposed their nether limbs and decked themselves in gold and silver, without thinking anything of it. He hardened his heart. If they did not blush, or feel like freaks on exhibition, why should he?

A Vision of Splendour

At the appointed time, three pipers, preceded in state by a dozen torch-bearers, played the illustrious company into the great hall or saloon prepared for its reception. Here the vision of splendour accomplished all that Mrs. Fairhurst had planned. The gorgeousness literally took the beholders' breath away. Never in the history of private entertainments were past and present blended in such picturesque and princely opulence. Tartans of all the clans that fought and forayed since Ossian bade farewell to Morar were displayed in the manner most flattering to Highland pride and most effective in decoration. Weapons of all shapes and ages gleamed upon the walls, the bow, the spear, the Lochaber axe, and the small, handy, businesslike *skene dhu* being interspersed with ancient armour dented in many a fray, and the more peaceful trophies of the chase. Antiquary and artist had excelled themselves; the "microcosm" was a complete success.

Looking round half-furtively as she entered, Mrs. Fairhurst experienced the delicious thrill of unqualified triumph. Her grandees were not only impressed, they were overwhelmed by the spectacle. The Duke of Invercowrie blinked as if the sun all of a sudden took his eyes; the Earl of Dundaloch pursed his mouth as if reckoning the cost, the Dundallochs being ever keen on finance. The assembly in general was dazzled, ravished with surprise and delight, and perhaps a little perplexed. So much Mrs. Fairhurst made out at a glance.

The music was supplied by a brace of harpists imported from Wales (alas! the harp of the Gael is silent), an orchestra of picked stars from London, the pipers aforesaid, and a quartette of native fiddlers, who viewed the importations with open scorn.

"Sassenach trash!" said one of them. "We'll play them blind before morning!"

Faces in the Mist

"Ay," struck in a second, "and drink them blind, too!" Highland musicians have enviable gifts of versatility.

But in spite of its historic interest and lavish magnificence, the "microcosm" was but a trifle in the grand scheme. After all, the guests were the thing, and their quality filled Mrs. Fairhurst with rapture. There had been a moment of trembling doubt. In fact, she had spent some troubled days and sleepless nights over the possibility of failure. Would that shaggy lion, the Duke of Invercowrie, accept her invitation? Would the Earl of Dundaloch? Or would they keep to their castles, sniffing contemptuously? The fears and doubts of the parvenu were, in fact, sharp upon her. Here was her Waterloo; what was to be the issue?

The hesitating Fates decided to behave handsomely, and lo! the company was such as would turn the head of any hostess not accustomed to regal grandeur. Mrs. Fairhurst hoped she was above empty pride, but the fashionable world would read of her brilliant triumph with the envy which is the most delectable proof of success. For, shrewd in all things, she was careful to provide her own reporters, well knowing that facts are—as they are made to appear. It was all a supreme triumph of ambition, talent, courage, wealth—particularly wealth plus the resource of the American woman.

Only one small fly marred the pure amber of her felicity. Kenneth was whole once more, and the Chisholms, brother and sister, were of the assembly, their presence being due to the treasonous ingenuity of Pamela. The fight was stiff between mother and daughter, between woman and woman, each keenly bent on her own game. Mrs. Fairhurst first laughed at the preposterous notion of inviting

A Vision of Splendour

them, then raged, and finally, accusing her daughter of wilful perversity and unfilial behaviour, assented.

Thus beaten, she found a morsel of consolation in the thought that, being obscure, they would naturally hide among the shadows, taking care not to obtrude themselves on their betters. And if she could manage it, they should be made to realise their social insignificance. We shall see how that purpose was fulfilled.

The first dance went off "beautifully," she told herself. The Duke had not stood too rigidly on his immense dignities. He had, in fact, been almost as agreeable as a common man; made a ducal joke, at which Mrs. Fairhurst, as in duty bound, laughed explosively, without quite seeing the point; whereupon he beamed graciously, for even dukes like to have their jokes appreciated. Reuben, too, had worried through without getting entangled in the finery of the Duchess, or having other embarrassing misadventures. When the dance ended, his wife shot him a glance of approval, a hearty signal of "Well done!" It was necessary to keep an eye on him, and he was likely to do best by being judiciously encouraged. When his turn came, she took her place with the Earl of Dundaloch in a radiant glow, but her joy received a sudden shock.

"Pardon my curiosity," said his lordship, screwing his eyeglass a little tighter, "but will you tell me who is your son's partner? I congratulate you on his good taste, which, on the usual principle of heredity, comes from his mother. By Jove! what a handsome girl!"

Mrs. Fairhurst turned quickly in the direction in which the Earl was looking, to see Carew advancing with Elsie Chisholm on his arm.

"It's Miss Chisholm," she replied, in a horror that was not to be concealed.

Faces in the Mist

"Ah!" said the Earl, in a changed voice. "And—er—is that young Chisholm I see with Miss Fairhurst?"

"Seems to be," answered Mrs. Fairhurst, a cold sweat breaking upon her.

"I hadn't noticed him in the crush," the Earl remarked frigidly. "And I scarcely expected the pleasure of meeting either him or his sister at Bruan Castle."

Mrs. Fairhurst said nothing, having nothing to say. Instinctively her eyes travelled in search of Lord Benbreck. He stood in a corner, monocle tightly screwed in eye, watching Kenneth and his partner with unmistakable resentment. Mrs. Fairhurst was horrified. It seemed that a whole social world was crashing about her ears. Then a vehement passion of anger possessed her. What was Pamela thinking of! Had Carew lost his head! As for the Chisholms, their insolence was insufferable, as they should find out.

The music struck up, and Mrs. Fairhurst moved off, scarcely knowing what she did. What she was conscious of was the sudden coldness of the Earl, and her own furious anger against the unlucky Chisholms.

CHAPTER XI

HEREDITARY ENEMIES

PAMELA needed no mentor to tell her she had committed the unpardonable sin, and that clouds of anger hung over her. In truth she was doubly guilty, since both her mother and Benbreck were offended. Her mother could be propitiated at leisure later on. But if disaster was to be averted, Lord Benbreck must have immediate attention.

Finding or making opportunity as only a woman can, she became teasingly gay, rallied him on his untimely gloom, hinting it might be a case of conscience, while remarking in her own mind that beyond question my lord exhibited symptoms of jealousy. It was great sport, the spice of danger being just sufficient to give zest to the adventure. On Kenneth's name being mentioned, she remarked innocently: "Did you tell me you knew Mr. Chisholm?"

"Never spoke to him in my life," was the disdainful and amazed answer. She cried out in equal astonishment:

"Oh! I thought everybody knew everybody else in this region, that it isn't as in a city where you may know nothing of your next-door neighbour. You should know each other. He is a real good fellow. You shall judge for yourself."

He would have excused himself from judging, explained there were certain passages in the Dundaloch-Chisholm history which made personal relations extremely objectionable, to say the least. But, for

Faces in the Mist

reasons of her own, Pamela waited for no explanations. She was off before he could prevent her, eager, as it seemed, to play the good angel. Luckily, Kenneth was disengaged and accessible.

"I want you, please," she whispered earnestly. "Come"—a command he would have obeyed in face of a blazing battery of artillery.

She returned outwardly confident, inwardly tingling with fear and doubt—not without reason. The two men coloured as they looked at each other with haughty keenness, neither daring to give his impulse rein. But it needed no words to tell her she had brought enemies together. Their expression was as the gleam of bared swords. Pamela stood before them excited but smiling, an enchanting figure diffusing seraphic good-will. Her dress, her jewels, costly as money could buy, but not vulgarly profuse, became her inimitably. A simple sprig of myrtle softened the blaze of gems in her lustrous brown hair; a deep, rich glow was on her face, and her eyes shone with a mischievous, if perturbed radiance.

As it happened the trio were in a corner of a great vaulted conservatory behind a cluster of palms which screened them from the general view, and, indeed, ensured almost complete privacy. Pamela stood by a flowering oleander, a head taller than herself, against a background of rare exotic bloom. The place breathed of Eden, but Eden with a subtle sense of something gone wrong. And, in fact, the serpent had entered.

Watching keenly, Pamela marked the mutual challenge, the hot defiance in the eyes of the two men. The sudden blaze of hatred surprised and alarmed her. Manifestly the veneer of civilisation had not quenched the old Celtic fierceness, of which she had lately heard so much. On fit opportunity, she could well imagine, these two would be at it with sword or dagger in deadly combat that would continue

Hereditary Enemies

while either could ply a weapon. Her pulses were dancing. She flushed and paled in the same instant. But with admirable self-command she maintained her appearance of gaiety.

"It's nice to be original," she cried, treating their bellicose attitude a delightful joke. "But not too original. Why the delay?"

Lord Benbreck turned to her apologetically. "A very old story, Miss Fairhurst, and not worth repeating," he answered.

"Something more than a story," interpolated Kenneth, from between set teeth.

"And less than a feud, I hope," she observed, lightly. "At home, in the wild south, we have vendettas that sometimes end in terrible deeds. But here, why, I thought the people were all Christians."

"Oh, sometimes they really are," Benbreck laughed. "Only, you see, your south is our north. As you will discover, if you think it worth while to study us, we Highlanders have hot blood and long memories. In truth, we're rather given to the diversion of raking up the past."

"On the contrary, some of us find it a most convenient plan to forget the past," Kenneth remarked, meaningly. Benbreck looked towards the roof as if with a sudden inclination to yawn. Then he brought his eyes back to Pamela.

"Shall we move on, Miss Fairhurst?" he asked, insinuatingly, and offered his arm. But Pamela pretended not to notice. She saw Kenneth turn white with the whiteness of anger, and the fire in his eyes became a shooting flame.

"I like old stories," she remarked, with a brave effort to be composed. "I have heard a good many since coming here, some of them very romantic and exciting."

Faces in the Mist

"I assure you this one is neither romantic nor exciting, Miss Fairhurst," Benbreck made haste to inform her.

"Will you allow me to judge?" she returned with her most caressing smile.

"Well, if it interests you," responded Benbreck, "it appears that some time in the dim and troubled past the Dundallochs and the Chisholms had certain dealings, which, in the cant phrase, did not prove mutually satisfactory. Bear in mind what I told you about long memories and hot blood and you can imagine the sequel."

Of a sudden Kenneth grew extremely polite.

"Sir," he said, bowing, "for once we are in perfect agreement. The dealings to which you refer certainly were not mutually satisfactory. Quite the reverse. But," and a light glimmered in his eye that made Pamela hold her breath, "we are both Highland. Highlanders have the reputation of loving honour; some of them have even died for it before to-day. And I suggest that at a time which shall be mutually convenient, we may still have a mutual satisfaction."

Pamela's breath stopped as if frozen in her breast. Was she back in the middle ages? Was she dreaming, or was this in reality what it seemed to be—a challenge to combat?

Benbreck broke into a mocking laugh.

"Well, upon my word," he cried. "Well, upon my word."

That was the moment when Kenneth's sword would have leaped to its work had the occasion been fit. Since the presence of a lady, not to speak of his own character of guest and other hindrances, made action impossible, he smiled, still with deadly politeness.

"Permit me to congratulate you on a very pretty

Hereditary Enemies

gift of pleasantry," he said, looking straight at his enemy. "Not every one is so fortunately endowed."

Benbreck flicked the petals of a flower from his sleeve with ostentatious indifference.

"Oh," he returned. "The conjunctions of life are sometimes highly amusing. I trust it is no offence to thank you for adding so effectively to our gaiety. I had no idea Mr. Kenneth Chisholm was such an admirable comedian."

"Nor I that Lord Benbreck was so nice a critic," was the response. "Some very wise person has observed that we are apt to impute to others our own characteristic qualities. I beg of you not to confer on me benefactions that I neither deserve nor desire. As to comedy, they say it is twin brother to tragedy, and that the two often changes places suddenly."

"Do they indeed?" returned Benbreck, with the same air of elaborate negligence. "I am sure it is extremely obliging of you to explain all this to us."

His manner carried the art of well-bred offensiveness to its utmost point. Every look, every tone was barbed to wound and rankle. Doubting his own power of self-restraint, Kenneth looked appealingly at Pamela. "Why did you bring me here to be insulted?" he seemed to ask. "Release me. It is not in flesh and blood to endure this. Let me go lest worse happen." She throbbed with sympathy, was both sorry and annoyed. But how was she to cut the Gordian knot with any show of fairness, any appearance of grace? Besides, to do that were to abandon her purpose of making hereditary enemies into steadfast friends, and once roused to action she did not desist easily.

But in her zeal for peace she forgot one thing, the inveterate force of Celtic hate fired by an inherited quarrel. She looked from one to the other, wonder

Faces in the Mist

and reproach in her wide eyes. She was angry with both. There was no question that each desired to provoke the other. But for her presence there might even be a breach of the peace. Knowing this, seeing their animosity, she was yet confirmed in her resolution. They should shake hands or she should know why.

She was considering what next to do, her heart beating at triple speed, when a merry laughing face all at once peered through the palms.

"Hullo," said the voice of Carew, cheerfully, "hullo, didn't know you were here."

He thrust aside a palm to make way for his companion, and Elsie Chisholm stepped forward, then drew up as if startled to find herself in such company.

"You know Miss Chisholm, of course," Carew said to Lord Benbreck, noticing that he made no sign. "Lord Benbreck, Miss Chisholm, and Mr. Kenneth Chisholm," he added in a boyish spirit of humour. "Dare say you've heard of him. His speciality is falling over cliffs and coming through alive. Hullo, what's up?" he added, looking round the silent, chilly company. "Say, where's the corpse?"

Benbreck gave a little laugh.

"Blessed if I didn't think you were all mourning for the dead," said Carew. "Anything wrong?"

But to that pertinent question there was no answer.

CHAPTER XII

HOME TRUTHS AND A QUARREL

AN hour later Kenneth slipped unperceived out of the dazzling assembly into the night to cool himself with a breath of fresh air. Oppressed and choking with indignation, he escaped lest he should explode and precipitate a scene. For the sake of others he would rather cut off his right hand than do that.

The night was one to soothe racked nerves. A soft autumn moon silvered wood and hill. There was a sound of distant waters in the air, the whole landscape breathed of peace, in sharp contrast to the seething tumult in his breast. Stepping into the open he glanced skyward, and the full moon shone an instant on a face that was drawn and deathly white. The white anger is ever the worst, and Kenneth had never known such rage as now burned within him, a rage which seemed the fiercer for having to be ruthlessly suppressed. He moved on instinctively, keeping close to a thicket of tall shrubs, as though to make sure of darkness. He wanted to be alone, to think, if the truth must be told, to plan repayment of affronts that were as acid on raw wounds.

"Oh," he said to himself, the furious blood singing in his ears. "Oh, for one hour of the time when a man's sword could repay insults."

The hatred of ten generations beat frantically in heart and brain clamouring for vengeance. It seemed that ten Dundalloch lives would not suffice for his great revenge.

Faces in the Mist

All at once there was a slight, quick rustle ahead of him, and the shadow of a man leapt into the moonlight.

"Like myself, Mr. Kenneth Chisholm finds it salutary to take the air," Benbreck observed, stepping directly in front of him. "This second meeting is as unexpected as the first, and even more welcome." And then, with extraordinary venom, "You cur, you presumptuous cur."

A sudden darkness fell on Kenneth such as comes of a stunning blow. But it passed instantly.

"Lord Benbreck does well to avail himself of the safety of the occasion," he returned, "otherwise he should eat his words to the last syllable."

"So the cur snarls, does it?" was the exasperating rejoinder. "It shall have the stick unless it takes care."

"I bid you beware," said Kenneth, every muscle in his body tightening. "I am not accustomed to such language."

"Really," sneered Benbreck, "then all I can say is that it is high time you had the truth without mincing."

"Am I to understand that you are wilfully provoking me?" Kenneth asked, in a voice electric with passion. "If so, I warn you that you may regret it."

"You may understand precisely what you like," was the retort. "As to your warning, have the goodness to reserve it for someone else. I despise it quite as much as I despise you."

"Look here," cried Kenneth, advancing a step, his fist clenched, his arteries beating like steam valves. "Already to-night you have done your best to insult and exasperate me, taking refuge in the protection of Miss Fairhurst's presence. More than that, you were at pains to insult my sister, who could not defend

Home Truths and a Quarrel

herself. Miss Fairhurst is not with us now, and again I warn you to be careful."

Benbreck was recovering his calm insolence. "How good of you," he laughed. "You really are a pattern of kindness. Well, I advise you in turn to keep your threats to yourself, they might return to roost; and I have to inform you once for all that Miss Fairhurst's name is not to be introduced between us."

"I am glad of that," said Kenneth, the fierce surge within settling to a yet more dangerous quiet. "We are free, then, to deal with each other, man to man, without reserve."

"Oh, quite," returned Benbreck, with elaborate unconcern. "Quite. Fire away."

"Thanks. I trust then you are prepared to apologise?"

"Really? In the circumstances I must say your trust is very remarkable. And, dare I say, rather extravagant? I am not prepared to apologise."

"You tell me that deliberately?"

"As deliberately as I am capable of making it."

"You decline to apologise?"

"Absolutely. Can I make my answer plainer? Having given that information, and stated one or two pertinent truths, there seems no need to prolong the interview. I bid Mr. Kenneth Chisholm a very good night."

He turned away, shaking out his pocket handkerchief daintily, as though to ward off some foul infection. But Kenneth sprang forward.

"Stop," he said, in a voice that was not to be disobeyed. "You are not going."

Benbreck drew himself up with a mock air of astonishment.

"This grows outrageous," he remarked. "Mr. Kenneth Chisholm forgets himself," and made to pass on.

Faces in the Mist

"You are not going just yet," repeated Kenneth, planting himself more determinedly. "Take that as settled, please. You said we were to deal with each other frankly, man to man. I take you at your word. You shall apologise, or——"

"You will know the reason why. All I have to say is that those who mount very high horses often ride for a fall. I presume you are aware what conduct of this sort means?"

"Perfectly. And I take all risks. The occasion was not of my seeking. Yet I am glad it has come—extremely glad. For the first time in our lives we two are alone together."

"So we are," said Benbreck, blowing his nose. "So we are—for the first time, and I sincerely trust the last."

"The best of reasons for making the most of our opportunity. Such a piece of good fortune is not to be thrown away. It's a luxury to have the chance of speaking the truth without fear or favour. Let me say then, you have proved most convincingly that a peer, and the son of a peer, may be a cad and a coward."

Benbreck blinked in the moonlight, letting his monocle fall. It seemed out of place in any case.

"In turn, I warn you to take care," he said, crushing the perfumed handkerchief like a rag in his hand.

"Thank you, I will try. If I fail, you are welcome to your advantage. My second item is that for years, for generations, my family has been subjected to unbearable insults and injuries by yours."

"Pray do not introduce your family. To tell the truth, it does not interest me."

"I am not at present studying your tastes."

"Since frankness is the order of the day, then I condemn your family as much as I despise you. You see I am perfectly honest. In reference to you

Home Truths and a Quarrel

and your family, I have never dissembled my feelings."

"I shall be as honest as yourself, and say that honesty is a strange plea on your lips. When the wolf in the fable was caught with the blood of the lamb red on its jaws, it protested that the murder was really committed in kindness. Some I could name have with equal force claimed law and right in their iniquitous doings. Shall I tell you why your conduct has been that of a coward and cad?"

"Please yourself by all means; only if you are wise you will use more appropriate language."

"You forget we have made a compact to speak the truth. Your conduct is what it is, first because you are what I have called you, and next because he who violates justice and honour ever bears a rancorous hatred against those whom he or his house has wronged. The Chisholms have dwindled in their estates, while the Dundaloch lands have spread."

"This grows interesting. Anything else?"

"All in good time. If every man had his own, and no thieves were tolerated by law, the Chisholm revenues and the Chisholm lands would both be larger to-day."

"Thieves," echoed Benbreck, catching at the word.

"I ask you again to beware of what you say."

"And I have again to remind you that we bargained for the truth. For once you shall have it. Therefore I repeat, thieves. You have consequently the honour to be——"

"What?"

"The descendant of thieves and robbers; or if you like it better, a receiver and inheritor of stolen property. By fraud and guile the Dundalochs took what was not theirs."

Benbreck's nonchalance vanished.

"You lie," he cried in a sudden frenzy. "You

Faces in the Mist

lie, like your whole dirty brood! If it were worth while I would chastise you as your inscience and your falsehood deserve."

"If it were worth while the chastisement would not be on one side," was the retort.

In spirit the words were truculent; but they were uttered in a strangely even tone—a tone out of which all passion seemed to have passed. And indeed, as Benbreck grew hot Kenneth grew cool with the deadly coolness of the steel that glimmers and goes home. In such moods men do terrible deeds with the lightness of boys at play. In that moment it would have seemed a small thing to Kenneth to wring his adversary's neck and cast the lifeless thing from him like the carcase of a wild beast. Once more Benbreck made to pass.

"Let me go," he said furiously. "Let me go at once."

"When I am done with you," was the calm reply. "Don't imagine I am merely playing. It is business, not bluster, between us to-night."

"Do you refuse to let me pass?"

"Apologise, and you shall have free passage and welcome."

"Never," hissed Benbreck; "never!"

"It is a long time to wait," said Kenneth grimly. "You may catch cold."

It was now his turn to be tantalising. He had driven through Benbreck's armour of disdain, penetrated the hard, thick crust of aristocratic indifference, and found his man. The rest was easy. For a minute the two looked at each other hard and straight. In Benbreck's eyes there was a murderous glare.

"You lying reptile," he cried ferociously. "You vile, lying reptile!" and sprang like a tiger at its prey. There was a fierce crunching of feet on the gravel,

Home Truths and a Quarrel

and he was hurled back sprawling. It was all done in a twinkling, so quickly indeed, that Kenneth scarcely knew what was happening. As he looked down at the fallen man there was a muffled cry, and a hooded figure ran swiftly towards them out of the shadows of the castle. In the excitement the hood fell back, revealing the white, terrified face of Pamela.

CHAPTER XIII

NEWS FOR KENNETH

BENBRECK picked himself up nimbly enough, and Kenneth instinctively put himself on guard for another onset. In so doing he sorely misunderstood his man. My lord had no intention of attacking again, having divined a better method. Assuming a look of grieved innocence which said plainly, "My misfortune, you see, to fall in with a bully and ruffian," he began to employ the perfumed handkerchief in flicking the soil from his clothes. He did it with a high air, as if disdaining an affray with such an adversary. The gust of passion had apparently spent itself in the one vicious spring.

In truth his heart leaped to a provident opportunity. To throw away the advantage which a look of martyrdom and a lady's presence gave him would be to act the fool, and the Dundallochs were ever noted for a well-calculated policy.

"I grieve you should witness such a scene, Miss Fairhurst," he said, in his best French manner. "I offer you apologies for being concerned in it, however unwillingly." And then, turning to Kenneth, he added: "If I refrain from making suitable acknowledgment of your attentions, it is because circumstances forbid it. We may meet again."

The device was neatly and artfully used. No beholder could have doubted that he was the victim of gross and villainous conduct, or that he was too much the lord to be provoked into a breach of good manners.

News for Kenneth

"With all my heart I hope we shall," retorted Kenneth, breathing very hard. "And then perhaps you won't have the refuge of a lady's protection."

It was exactly the kind of speech that Benbreck desired to draw. He looked meaningly at Pamela, as though to say, "Glad you can judge for yourself of this boor's behaviour." But he made no reply. On no account must he compromise himself.

Meanwhile, Pamela had not spoken a word. She stood looking from one to the other, first in dumb-founded amazement, and then searchingly, as though to ascertain for herself which was to blame for this extraordinary brawl. Hitherto her sympathies were almost wholly engaged on one side. Fair-minded, generous, loathing the wily schemer and grasper, however much the law might seem to be with him, she had pondered many long hours in secret on the hard fortune of the Chisholms, and from each reverie or review had risen with a quickened pity and fellow-feeling. The turbulent flow and ebb of human affairs, she well knew, must bring hardships. It was not always the worthy who crested the waves in triumph, nor the undeserving who were overwhelmed in the trough of the sea. So she had reasoned, her compassion at white heat, her heart finding ready argument for her head. But ocular evidence and Benbreck's art were giving all her fine thoughts the lie. Kenneth should be condignly punished for that. With a reproachful face she turned upon him.

"Is this how you observe the laws of hospitality?" she asked, as one who is at once offended and bitterly disappointed.

The question pierced like an arrow and struck Kenneth speechless. Pamela came just a second too late, but that second made all the difference. A moment sooner, and she would have seen the truth for herself. Now it was impossible to explain. He

Faces in the Mist

hung his head in silence—in guilt, as she at once concluded. Benbreck, still flicking off the dirt, stood with his meek martyr air, a silently accusing witness.

"Have you nothing to say?" she demanded, her tone implying that silence was proof of guilt.

Kenneth made a bow that was almost an obeisance.

"I am exceedingly sorry, Miss Fairhurst," he stammered.

A spasm of anger shot through her. Pah! What excuse, what explanation was that? The scullion in the kitchen had the same reply in a delinquency.

"I am sorry!" A man should justify himself. If Kenneth had trounced Benbreck, and given a decent reason for the trouncing, she could admire, if she could not openly forgive; but he did nothing of the kind. It appeared she had set up something in his likeness, endowing it with all manly qualities, and lo! at the first adverse breath it had fallen miserably to pieces. She was angry and mortified. Did she know, did he guess how she fought for him, what it cost her to get him to Bruan Castle at all? She thought she had a hero, and behold! a clodhopper, a low brawler.

With a smug satisfaction Benbreck marked the gleam in her eyes, and made haste to avail himself of its aid.

"This is no place for you, Miss Fairhurst. Permit me to see you indoors again," he said, in his most gallant fashion, and offered his arm. She cast another look at the culprit, as if giving him a final chance to redeem himself. But he said nothing, and she turned quickly back to Benbreck. An hour before she would have declined his arm. Now she took it at once and swept off, her head high in the air, leaving Kenneth without another word or glance.

For a moment he gazed after the pair in blank stupefaction. Then he drew a long, shuddering breath. So he stood there condemned, despised, rejected

News for Kenneth

as a brawler, a low person who had not even grace enough to keep him from affronting his friends and violating all the laws of hospitality. Pamela had turned her back on him—openly. Benbreck had triumphed. Ah! he was no match for Benbreck. What mattered his innocence? He was beaten, crushed—the usual luck of the Chisholms in conflict with the Dundallochs.

At the sound of a stealthy footfall behind, he turned sharply upon the half-crouching figure of a man.

"Callum, is it you?" he said, in a queer voice, by no means glad, in that moment of abasement, to see even an old and tried friend.

"Yes, Mr. Kenneth, it's me," Callum answered cautiously. He looked round to make sure they were alone; then advancing a step he asked in a fierce whisper, "Why didn't ye do it, Mr. Kenneth, why didn't ye do it?"

"Do what, Callum?"

"Is it asking that ye are?" was the meaning response. "My old heart just dauted on my ribs when I saw how ye had him. Watching back there in the black of the wood, says I to myself, 'Now he'll do it. The gran' chance has come at last. Now Mr. Kenneth,' says I, 'think of all that's come and gone, and let the heir of the thieving Dundallochs have his due.' What for did ye let him go, Mr. Kenneth, and me waiting there to swear ye were justified?"

"What would you have me do to him, Callum?" Kenneth asked, trying not too successfully to pull himself together.

"Ochone and ochri! Is it your father's son that is asking?" returned Callum. "Man, what is a Highland dirk for?"

"For ornament, mostly, in these days, Callum."

"More's the pity," retorted Callum. "Och, och, more's the pity. It was not always so."

"Would you have me commit murder, Callum?"

Faces in the Mist

Kenneth inquired, with a wan smile. "That would be making the cure worse than the disease."

"Murder," echoed Callum. "Murder, who's thinking of murder? Though, indeed, a hundred murders, one on top of the other, would not wipe out all that the Chisholms owe the Dundallochs. It's a big, big debt, and long, long overdue, as I'm well acquainted. He set on you, didn't he?"

"Yes, I believe he did."

"If you're not sure I saw him with my own two eyes, the veecious little whelp. It minded me of a pug jumping at a St. Bernard. Well, then, he began it. You have to take care of yourself, haven't you? As you're doing that he gets hurt a wee thought more, maybe, than is good for his health? Who's to blame? If any lawyer body in all broad Scotland said you were I'd tell him to his impudent face he was just a son of Ananias and Sapphira. And you let the chance slip. Oh Mr. Kenneth, Mr. Kenneth, but I'm sore disappointed."

"I am disappointing all my friends, Callum," Kenneth responded with a sigh. "You'll just have to be generous and try to forgive me."

"What is it you are saying?" demanded Callum, almost angrily. "Is it forgiveness you're speaking about? Who am I to be thinking of forgiving you, Mr. Kenneth? Ye mustn't be putting the shame on me in my old age."

Kenneth put out his hand, meaning to grip Callum's, but in an instant it was seized and kissed passionately.

"Callum, Callum," gulped Kenneth, a sudden lump in his throat. "It's you that's putting the shame on me. There, there, as to this unfortunate matter," he added, when he could trust himself to speak more fully, "you musn't forget that I am here as a guest."

"And what was he?" replied Callum. "But it was always the way of the Dundallochs to give things

News for Kenneth

a twist and a colour to suit themselves. They never needed anyone to tell them how to do that. And Benbreck's just as clever and cunning at it as any of the lying breed. He clean misled Miss Pamela, that's what he did, clean misled her. Can I tell ye something, Mr. Kenneth?"

"Aren't we friends, Callum? Need you ask?"

"Thank'ee for that, Mr. Kenneth. Friends we have been and will be unless ye throw poor old Callum overboard, and even then he'd be your friend if he could. Can I count the times ye made a cock-horse of me and crowed on my shoulder, crying out to look how big you were now, ay, and crooched on my knee making me tell ye ghost stories till my own hair stood on end, and my flesh was like creeping ice? Often and often Callum thinks of it all among his bits of flowers and things. But tell me, can ye be guessing how ye came to be here?"

"Because Mrs. Fairhurst invited me, I suppose, Callum."

"Ay, ay, no doubt Mrs. Fairhurst invited ye; no doubt but that's a fact. But ye'll not be speaking of it if I tell ye how it was done? It's in my heart, and I can't very well keep it to myself."

"Anything you choose to tell me will be just between ourselves, Callum."

"Well, one day I was in the garden among some thick bushes that hid me out of sight, and who should come along but Miss Pamela and her mother, talking pretty loud and fast as if they weren't just agreeing about things. 'I tell you I won't have him,' says Mrs. Fairhurst, as sharp and cutting as a razor. 'Don't mention his name to me any more, please.' 'Very well, mother,' says Miss Pamela. 'Then you can just go ahead and leave me out of your arrangements.' You should have heard the old wife then! She called Miss Pamela this, that, and the other thing

Faces in the Mist

till she had to stop for want of breath. 'I've told you I won't have him,' says she, getting her wind again. 'Let that be enough.' Now can you be guessing who the 'him' was?"

"How should I, Callum? I am not a wizard."

"Indeed, then, Mr. Kenneth, and that's true," Callum admitted, "if you're anything like as stupid as you pretend, never jalousing the reason for that flare-up. Well, I have to tell you it was just yourself, and no other man on God's earth. What do you think of that?"

"I really don't know, Callum," returned Kenneth, his pulses beginning to dance to another tune. "I seem not only to quarrel myself, but to be a cause of quarrel to others."

"Hoots!" said Callum, "a good, honest fall-out I ever yet did anybody harm, provided the cause is good. And it was grand to hear Miss Pamela. 'Callum, my man,' says I, 'if you was young and strapping and well-born, that's the lass for you. She's like wisdom—above rubies.' Man, Mr. Kenneth, I warrant your ears were burning. Of course Miss Pamela and her mother didn't know anybody was there, and who was I to keek out and interfere? So I just kept quiet and let my betters a-be. I'm no eavesdropper, thank God; only, when my ears heard the name, they fair refused to stop listening. And at last, after this and that, and yon and the other thing, Mrs. Fairhurst says, as if clinching the business, 'Besides, Lord Benbreck mightn't like it, and that ought to be enough.'

"My heart jumped to my mouth and then stood still for the answer, and it came pat and quick. 'At home we worship money; here we are to worship rank. For the sake of diversity, a change of deity—is that it, mother?' says my brave Miss Pamela. 'Hooray!' says I to myself, just fidging to cry out. 'Hooray! well done! a black eye for Benbreck!'

News for Kenneth

'As to Mr. Chisholm,' says she, 'his blood's as good as any in the land.' 'I'm not interested in his blood,' says the mother, with a snap. 'I've always understood it's a good thing to have,' says Miss Pamela, 'and anyway, Mr. Chisholm is a gentleman.' By that time I could hardly contain myself, but by the grace of God I clapped a hand on my mouth and managed to hold in. 'Ho, ho!' thinks I, 'a gentleman, anyway. Up higher yet, my bonnet.' There was more, but that'll be enough the now.

"Well, the long and short of it was that you were invited by Mrs. Fairhurst, as you say. But whose guest are you? Miss Pamela's and nobody else's. Thinking of that, the daftest thoughts began to dance in my head. You know what the good book says, Mr. Kenneth: 'Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.' Faith! I've had a grand time of it, dreaming dreams."

"And I am disappointing them," observed Kenneth with a wry smile.

Callum gazed at him intently a moment before replying.

"I'll not say they're just coming true all at once," the old man admitted sorrowfully. "What made you let him go sailing off with Miss Pamela as if he owned her?" he asked, reverting to his grievance.

"What right had I to prevent him, Callum? Miss Fairhurst went of her own free will."

"Right!" repeated Callum, scornfully. "Right is as it's made in this world; and as for free will, it's often a case of the pot boiling over because the fire's too strong. Ye see, Miss Pamela didn't know the rights and the wrongs of it, and so Benbreck sneaked in and sneaked off—a winner by his way of it. That's the Dundalloch style all over. Foxier than a fox, fuller of guile than a serpent." He paused a moment, then looking round again, lest there might be intruders,

Faces in the Mist

added, with a sudden touch of grimness, "What would folks say, d'ye think, if anything was to happen to Benbreck, by accident like, and not a soul in all the world to blame?"

"Callum," returned Kenneth, quickly, knowing his man, "as you love me, no nonsense, please."

"I can give ye my word on the Holy Bible it would be no nonsense," Callum assured him. "And thinking things over, up and down and round about, it's maybe my opeenion ye did right after all not to dirty your hands with him. What is he for your father's son to touch? But what's not fit for the master might be fit enough for the man."

"What do you mean, Callum?" Kenneth demanded, on a note of alarm.

The old man's face was dimmed by the shadow of the wood, but Kenneth could see that it was flushed and grim.

"What do I mean?" he returned. "I'll tell you." He leaned forward, whispering fiercely. "That's what I mean," he added, drawing up.

"Callum," cried Kenneth, "you must not think or speak like that. You must promise——"

"I'll promise nothing," put in Callum, hotly; "for to tell you the truth it is not to you I'd like to be telling lies, Mr. Kenneth, not to you at all."

He looked at Kenneth intently, and the hard expression became one of wistful, doting tenderness. So a father might look at the son of his love. Then like a flash the sternness returned. "Lord Benbreck has done this night what has cost him dear," he said vehemently. "Aye, if he was a lord fifty times over."

"If you attempted any such thing as you say, they'd give you penal servitude," said Kenneth. "If you succeeded, they'd hang you."

"And what of that?" was the retort. "What of

News for Kenneth

that if I have my will of him? I'm near by with it, anyway. Three score years and ten, says the holy David, three score years and ten; and I'm in sight of my seventieth milestone; and if a man has his heart's desire in the day, what's the odds in going to bed an hour or two afore the ordinar? Ye'll just—wheest!" he broke off. "Who's yon? It's him, Mr. Kenneth," he added excitedly; "as sure as death it's him; and she's with him. I wish he was alone!"

"I have told you there must be no nonsense," said Kenneth, decisively. "Come, let us get out of this." And gripping Callum by the arm almost angrily as it seemed, he swung him about. But the next instant a low, rippling laugh reached their ears. With a jerk that freed him, Callum swung back.

"Losh!" he cried. "Am I doited, or is it Miss Elsie? And Mr. Carew, too. Listen to them, Mr. Kenneth; just listen to them laughing like bairns. Who'd have thought of the like of that?"

Callum had come slap on a great discovery.

CHAPTER XIV

CAREW AS PEACEMAKER

KENNETH immediately strode forward to them.

"Elsie," he said in a strained voice, "we must go at once."

"Go!" cried Carew in amazement. "Why, the show isn't right on yet. All the fun's ahead."

"All the same, we must go," repeated Kenneth. "Elsie, go and get ready, please." But again Carew struck in.

"Wait," he said, in his sharp American way. "I want to understand, if you don't mind. What's happened to knock the bottom out of things like this, eh?"

"You have a right to know," Kenneth replied. "I've had the misfortune to offend Miss Fairhurst."

"Well, I guess you didn't mean to," returned Carew, promptly.

"No, assuredly I didn't mean to."

"Then I guess it's all right," said Carew, blithely. "Guilt, as I once heard a lawyer explain, is in the intention, not in the deed. You can apologise if you care to. Pam wouldn't be unreasonable, I reckon."

"I am afraid my offence is not to be wiped out by any apology," Kenneth responded, ruefully.

Carew took the lighted cigar from his mouth, looking at the other keenly. "As bad as that?" he said, his brows arched in amazement.

"As bad as that," was the answer. "Miss Fairhurst

Carew as Peacemaker

may tell you all about it when I am out of the way, and then perhaps you will understand."

"Put my virtues on my tombstone when I'm dead," rejoined Carew. "Bad plan leaving misunderstandings to be cleared up in obituary notices. The party that's gone don't have much satisfaction in that, so far as I can make out. No, sir. Let's have things put straight more or less as we go along. Saves heartbreak and all that. Look here," he added with a leap of inspiration, "is it in any way connected with Lord Benbreck?"

"Yes, it is connected with Lord Benbreck."

"Oh!" exclaimed Elsie, a shudder in her voice as if the very name were fateful.

Carew reflectively bit a piece off the end of his cigar.

"And who's to blame?" he asked.

"Naturally I say he is; as naturally he will say I am," was the reply.

"Which means," said Carew, with a judicious smile, "that an opinion by either of you of the other is to be accepted subject to a pretty considerable discount. Not worth face value, so to speak. Well, it's honest to point that out, anyway. I don't want to be inquisitive, you understand, but has it been a real genoowine row, or only just a passing difference?"

"A real genuine row, a very real row indeed."

"More than words?"

"Yes, more than words."

Carew whistled.

"Great ginger!" he cried excitedly, "you don't say! Anybody hurt?"

"Somebody's clothes spoiled, I think," was the answer.

"By gum!" answered Carew. And then, as if the matter might not be one for a lady's ears, he turned to Elsie. "Feels sort of chilly out here after the hot rooms, don't it? You mustn't catch cold, Miss Chisholm. Let me take you inside."

Faces in the Mist

"Pardon me," Kenneth put in, "if I ask my sister to get ready at once."

But Carew had the true American tenacity of purpose, and was not to be turned aside. Two sufficient reasons impelled him to stick to his own way—a desire to have more of Elsie's company, and a further desire to investigate the causes of this unpleasant sensation.

"Just one minute," he begged of Kenneth. "Miss Chisholm, please let me see you indoors. I could not forgive myself if you had to take ammoniated quinine to work off a cold. It's not nice." He laughed pleasantly. "Back in a minute," he nodded to Kenneth, and with the chivalry characteristic of Americans in their relations to women, he conducted Elsie within.

In his absence Kenneth thought with an energy that made the blood beat fiercely in his temples. Carew's friendly tactics were meant to achieve the impossible, to reconcile the irreconcilable. A Chisholm and a Dundalloch must always be to each other as oil and fire, as spark and powder. His inflamed Celtic pride beset Kenneth with the plea that he could not remain another minute where he was no longer a welcome guest. Nay, where his presence was actually resented. Neither could he allow his sister to remain. Callum had told him to whom he owed his invitation. Now she who fought for him turned away in disgust and disappointment. It was nothing to the point that the quarrel was forced upon him, or that he marvelled at his own self-restraint in the moment of provocation. Pamela saw just enough to misjudge; and explanations were out of the question. To her mind he was the guilty person. Yes, he must go at once, for two reasons: because he was in disgrace, and because the widest roof was not wide enough for Benbreck and himself.

Having confided Elsie to safe keeping within, Carew returned, to find him in this mood. Carew,

Carew as Peacemaker

at any rate, was sincerely for peace and for patience as a preliminary.

"You'll see the fun out, anyway?" he pleaded. "Everybody would be wondering what took you away, and nasty questions would be asked."

"I may seem obstinate," was the reply, "but you really must excuse me if I insist on going. Believe me, I appreciate your kindness, but I must go."

"Is there no way out of the mess?" Carew inquired, scratching his head in perplexity. "It ought not to be impossible for two gentlemen to settle a little difference quietly, and without disturbing anybody."

"There was a time," Kenneth responded, "when gentlemen settled differences as gentlemen. In this case I am afraid that admirable method is impossible."

"Why?"

"Because, for one thing I shouldn't get the chance if I wished it; and for another thing, because I daren't take it if I got it. I am here on sufferance."

"That's hot," observed Carew, a trifle grimly. "Who said you were here on sufferance?"

"Actions, as we know, are more expressive than words; and actions leave me in no doubt concerning my position."

"Your position, if I know anything about it, is that of a very welcome guest," said Carew with some emphasis.

"You are very kind, and I wish I could think so. Unhappily, there is no room for doubt. You will therefore allow me to express my regret and depart."

"Won't you tell me what's up, then?"

Kenneth laughed uneasily.

"The adage has it that silence is golden," he said.

"This must be doubly true when speech is dangerous."

"But when speech may be medicinal, silence is worse than sheer folly, it is criminal," returned Carew. "A word in season—you remember the proverb. I can

Faces in the Mist

see you don't want to say anything against the other side. That's honourable, and I respect you for it; b't," he went on with that directness of aim which every American acquires in the cradle, "this thing interests me, and I've kind of made up my mind to see it through—if you'll allow me. You see, the contingencies are considerable. It will upset several apple-carts if you were to go off in dudgeon, and especially if you insisted on taking Miss Chisholm with you."

"It's not at all likely she'd care to remain after me," said Kenneth.

"That's just it," agreed Carew, with more warmth than seemed necessary. "Now, you'll forgive me if I say right here I'd be mighty disappointed if Miss Chisholm went just yet. So would others, I'm sure. Now, you come into the smoke-room, and have a cigar, while I see Pam. Guess that'll be the best way of securing a settlement."

Kenneth would have declined, but Carew, taking his arm like an old chum, led him away. To have resisted would be to add to his offences, so he yielded even while his pride called out against the submission.

CHAPTER XV

TROUBLES THICKEN

TRUE to his purpose as a peacemaker, Carew promptly went in search of Pamela, and found her—white with indignation. Kenneth was guilty of an outrage, and she would have nothing more to do with him.

"Please don't speak to me of him," she told Carew, hotly. "I don't want to discuss the—the unfortunate thing any more. I was a fool for having anything to do with him; but I'm blotting him from my mind."

"I understand," said Carew, thoughtfully. "But what's the flare-up about, anyway, Pam?"

"Don't ask me questions, Carew," was the flaming retort. "I'm sick of the whole business."

"So," said Carew, "and to keep warm over it, you've gone and blown up the fire to a raging heat. That's evident, Pam. But what's the matter with Chisholm? What has he done?"

"Assaulted Lord Benbreck. There, is that enough for you?"

Carew's eyes widened in bewilderment.

"Guess that's a stunner all right," he confessed.

"Assaulted Lord Benbreck?"

"Yes, and—and—I had so much trouble in getting him invited. Mother was dead against having the Chisholms. Oh, I *am* disgusted."

Fears of vexation were in her eyes.

"Did you see the assault?" inquired Carew, with a deepening interest.

"Carew," replied Pamela, "I don't want to discuss

Faces in the Mist

it. The whole thing is too—too hideous. I'm so ashamed and vexed, I could just go and hide myself. Is he in the house now?"

"Yes, he's in the smoke-room."

"Then go and get him away. Tell him he must go. I can't endure his presence here any longer. It's—it's pollution to me."

"You wouldn't have me chuck him out, Pam?"

"Yes, I would. It's what he deserves. Oh, he has disgraced me this night, and I believed in him, thought he was a gentleman and all that."

"He wants to go," said Carew, more and more perplexed.

"Then let him. If he's not quick enough, push him away. For any sake get him out of this. He'll go at once, if he has any sense of decency."

"Oh, he's ready to go all right," Carew returned. "He'd have been off before this if I hadn't kept him. Drat it, I wish Miss Chisholm was not involved in the row."

"You wish Miss Chisholm was not involved in the row!" said Pamela, her eyes widening in turn. "Why do you wish that?"

"Because," was the emphatic answer, "she's by long odds the nicest girl I've met on this side, or the other side, either, for that matter."

And with that he turned away. Pamela looked after him blankly. Was he, too, playing the fool?

The exit was accomplished quietly and with the nicest regard for decorum. Ignorant of the cause, and surprised by the early departure of her unwelcome guests, Mrs. Fairhurst credited them with an unexpected sense of the appropriate. On that assumption she said "Good-bye" with her very best smile, and even murmured a regret they found it necessary to go so soon. Pamela was invisible; but Carew was conspicuously in evidence, and there was that in his face

Troubles Thicken

as he looked into Elsie's which would have sent his mother into hysterics had she seen it. Fortunately for their own peace of mind, Providence has mercifully decreed that mothers shall not see or know everything concerning their sons. Carew ceremoniously handed Elsie into the antique family coach, and tucked the rug as if grudging the very winds their privilege of caressing her.

"It's jolly hard lines you're going like this," he said, with boyish frankness; "I wish you weren't."

"It's good of you to say that," Kenneth responded heartily. "Old family failings will break out inopportunely. Accept my apologies."

"We'll defer apologies, if you don't mind," replied Carew, with a glance at Elsie. "At present I am in the dark. You'll enlighten me some time. I keep an open mind, you know."

Elsie rewarded him with a ravishing look of gratitude. For such another look he could almost fight Benbreck himself, regardless of the cause of quarrel, and when the old coach lumbered off, he stood gazing into the darkness after it in a thrilling muse.

"Finest girl I've ever known!" he told himself. And then in quick irritation, "Drat it, why can't Chisholm and Benbreck leave each other alone?"

Carew, in fact, had found a problem of his own.

He was not addicted to horticulture, but all at once he was seized with an overwhelming passion for flowers. Next day in the course of duty Callum was provoked almost to the laying on of hands by catching him doing havoc among the blooms that were the pride and joy of Bruan.

"Oh, Mr. Carew, Mr. Carew, what is it you are doing, sir?" Callum cried in an agony, as if the knife were at his own vitals. "Is it a booky ye'll be wanting, sir?"

"You've hit it, Callum," was the answer, "Come

Faces in the Mist

and help, and let it be absolutely the best your skill and resource can furnish."

"For the house, sir?" Callum asked as it were casually.

"The house!" Carew echoed disdainfully. "Guess not. Think I'd go foraging for the house? I want to present these flowers, so they must do both you and me credit."

"Oh, just so," said Callum, thoughtfully; "a leddy, maybe?"

"Bull's-eye again," laughed Carew. Callum's mouth twitched, and his eyes twinkled knowingly.

"It's grand to be young and bonny and well thought of," he remarked, as it might seem irrelevantly.

"Callum," said Carew, with conviction, "I guess there are no flies on you. But, if it's a fair question, why do you say that?"

"Hoots!" was the response. "And d'ye think, sir, that because Callum's a heather bird he has no notion of things, or that he was always as old as he is the day? When a young man goes stramashing among flower-beds and hot-houses and things, looking for bookies, it's not his grandmother he's thinking of, I'm jalousing."

"Callum," cried Carew, "you're lost in this side-tracked, one-mule place. You ought to have been a detective."

"I've whiles thought that myself, sir," Callum agreed modestly. "When I saw you hacking and cutting, my heart went dunt, dunt, as if I saw a bogle or something. 'Mr. Carew's in love,' says I to myself. 'He's never behaved like this before. A man in love's not canny. See him.' Forgive me, sir, but that's what I thought."

Carew laughed a frank, mirthful laugh.

"This is instructive," he observed. "How do you distinguish people in love?"

"Fuich!" replied Callum. "There's things the

Troubles Thicken

schoolmaster has no need to tell a body. When a man's a wee thought daft, the blind may guess he's not just exactly himself, sir."

"Then you would say that a person in love suffers more or less from insanity? Temporary softening of the brain, perhaps?"

"Maybe only of the heart," returned Callum, drily.

"Will ye be wanting a big booky, sir?"

"Positively the biggest and best you ever sent out of Bruan Gardens," was the reply. "Your reputation depends on it. Bruan cannot afford to be mean."

"We'll give up when it is, sir," replied Callum, and went on snipping with a painfully slow and reluctant hand. Till he knew where the flowers were going, or for whom they were meant, he had no notion of being extravagant. Carew watched impatiently.

"Look here," he said, as if meaning to help himself, "you bestow like a miser, Callum. Understand right here that we're not going to be niggardly. Wait, I'll take what I want for myself."

"No, no, ye needn't be doing that, Mr. Carew," Callum responded, with a spurt of zeal. "Surely, surely, there is no need of that, no need at all. Fuich, fuich, no. Can I be sending the booky for ye anywhere when it's ready?"

"Thanks, I'll take charge of it myself," Carew replied. But Callum's curiosity, once thoroughly aroused, was not to be appeased lightly.

"If I had any notion who it's for, I'd know better what to put in it," he remarked disinterestedly. The tone implied it was wholly a matter for the other whether or not he chose to be communicative.

"That's not a bad idea," Carew owned. "Well, it must be between ourselves. Mum's the word, you understand. It's going to Kinleath."

Callum looked at Carew a full half-minute before speaking.

Faces in the Mist

"To El—Miss Elsie?" he asked then.

"To Miss Elsie," was the reply.

"Gosh bless my soul alive," cried Callum, in sudden excitement. "And I never jaloused. Mr. Carew, I'm a blind, doitering, ramshackle old thing after all."

"Now that you know, see what you can do," said Carew, greatly amused by the quick change of mood.

"See," repeated Callum, joyously. "Yes, I'll see, and you'll see, and she'll see, too, sir. For Miss Elsie, well, well, to think of that. There's one thing I can tell ye, sir, and that is it'll have to be gey and bonnie to be half as bonnie as her that's to get it, and that's the truth, Mr. Carew, if ever it was spoken by me."

"Say, one would almost suspect you of being a lover, Callum," Carew laughed.

"Me a lover," responded Callum, deprecatingly, "Toots, toots, you're making game of me now, sir. Though if all tales be true, older and wiser men nor me have lost their balances amongst the lassies, ay, sir, and gone to the kirk on the head of it. But Miss Elsie—well sir, many's the time she's put her two arms about my neck, and kissed me for all the world as if I was her sweetheart, and I'm judging, sir, there's them would give a fine penny to be able to say that same."

"Guess that's so," Carew agreed, with a queer expression.

"But ye needn't be thinking thoughts all the same, sir," the old man proceeded. "Callum knows his place, and when we meet now it's not climbing on my knee to hear stories she is. Only I'll just take the liberty of saying this, sir, that there's few bonnier, and none better than Miss Elsie Chisholm, God bless her!"

"You've known her a long time, Callum?"

"Just all her life, Mr. Carew, all her life. And

Troubles Thicken

that's not so very long, either, for all she's a woman to-day. Eh, but we'll make the fine booky, Mr. Carew. This," throwing aside what he had cut, "will be doing brawly for the house. We'll be getting something better for Miss Elsie."

There was no niggardliness now. Mrs. Fairhurst lavished money without stint on her gardens, and in making his posy, Callum did not spare their riches. Neither in the process of selection did he fail to get in a sly reference to the matter that lay yet nearer his heart—the events of the night before. Carew took the bait like a starving trout.

CHAPTER XVI

ENLIGHTENMENT

"You mean the affair between Lord Benbreck and Mr. Chisholm?" he said, making no pretence of beating about the bush.

"What else, sir?" was the reply. "It's not my way, Mr. Carew, to be spying, but as luck and providence would have it, I saw things."

"I want to know," said Carew, his eyes bright with interest. "If you don't mind, Callum, I want to know the truth just as far as you can give it."

"The beginning of things is far, far back," remarked Callum.

"It's last night we're concerned with. Never mind the Flood, Callum."

"To be sure, sir. Noah's old history by this time. Well, if ye can be putting up with my way, I'll just tell ye, sir, what I saw. When my betters were busy with dancing and the like, I took a dander out by myself just to see what sort of a night it was, as you'd say. The stars was bonnie, bonnie, twinkling and clear, and as thick as bees in June flowers. Well, sir, as I was busy looking up and admiring them, and thinking of Him who made them and me, who comes out but my Lord Benbreck—not very happy by the look of him. He was crunching the gravel veeicious like under his heels, and I could see there was a storm on. Being in the dark of the wood I was out of sight, and feeling sure in my own mind he wanted none of my company, I just kept quiet. He was speaking to himself a good

Enlightenment

deal, and using words that's never heard when people are well-content."

"Warm language, eh, Callum?"

"Seven times heated with rage, or my ears deceived me, sir. He came over by near me, and I was wondering if I'd have to put the speak on him after all, and talk of the sky and the stars and the weather and what not as a kind of soothing syrup, when all at once there was a noise of other feet on the gravel. Quick as a weasel Lord Benbreck steps back, and the other comes on, never dreaming anyone was there. Then my heart gave a great dunt, for I could see it was Mr. Kenneth, and then I held my breath and forgot to wink."

"Yes," said Carew in a tense voice.

"Then out jumps my bold Benbreck, salutes Mr. Kenneth—ye may guess how, and the fat was in the fire."

"But why?" asked Carew, his brow puckered in perplexity. He did not understand either the fierceness or the complexity of a Highland feud.

"That, sir, belongs to the beginning of things," replied Callum. "When you're born hating a man; when hate boils in the blood and comes out with every breath you draw, and you meet him alone in the dark, it's not falling on his neck for fondness you'll be, is it, sir?"

"No, I guess not, Callum."

"Troth, Mr. Carew, ye may stop guessing, and be sure; not that I'm for upholding what our meenister calls the propensities of our sinful nature. It would ill-become me at my age. But, sir, when a pair of young fighting cocks meet, what's the natural thing to expect? There was this and that back and forth, compliments of a kind you understand, and every word as sharp as my pruning-knife. My heart just went wallop-wop, wallop-wop listening to them; and then in the crack of a thumb Lord Ben-

Faces in the Mist

breck springs like a wild cat at Mr. Kenneth, nearly knocking him down. Being obliged in self-defence, Mr. Kenneth, of course, pushed him back, and down he went. My heart was in my mouth at that in pure fear what would happen next. 'Murder,' says I. 'And me looking on. They'll have me up as a witness. The Lord save us from a hanging business.' For I knew that if Mr. Kenneth's dander was up it would be short work with Lord Benbreck. But just as my lord was getting to his feet out of the dirt, who comes tripping along but Miss Pamela. From what she saw she had no choice but to think that Mr. Kenneth had done the wrong."

"You are sure Lord Benbreck hit first?" said Carew, his blood racing.

"As sure as that you and me are speaking together the now, sir," was the answer. "Lord Benbreck hit first and hit last, for Mr. Kenneth never hit at all. And, indeed, I wondered at that, for the Chisholm temper is not as cold as ice, and he was sore angered. But in some extrorinar' way he managed to keep himself in. Only, ye see it was unlucky Miss Pamela saw Lord Benbreck rising very much hurt and insulted, by his way of it. And that made her eyes blaze. I could see their fire in the moonlight."

"But were there no explanations? Didn't Mr. Chisholm say anything?"

"Never a word sir, being a gentleman, before an angry leddy. And for that matter he had small chance; for in two twos Miss Pamela was round about and off, linking with Lord Benbreck, leaving Mr. Kenneth standing there in the night. And I can tell you this, Mr. Carew, it was a sore, sore heart the poor lad carried away with him when he left—ay, a sore, sore heart. The booky's going to be fine, sir," he added on a changed note. "I'm thinking Bruan will have no need to be ashamed of itself."

Enlightenment

"So," said Carew abstractedly.

The tale he had heard filled him with a rush of new thought and a great purpose. Slipping off to his own room, he considered the whole matter quietly over a cigar, with Callum's "booky" propped on a table by his side as counsellor and confidant. The clash of circumstance gave a fillip to his fighting instincts. As a believer in fair play, his sympathies were with Kenneth; but other and deeper sentiments were involved. In the mess, how were those sentiments likely to fare? The whole matter seethed with interest—cried aloud for investigation.

He was much too shrewd a student of affairs not to appreciate the enormous force of social politics. Wisdom said plainly that the feminine point of view must be considered. His mother must be handled delicately and tactfully. Her plans and ambitions were too important to be ignored; too obvious to be doubted or misunderstood. At some trouble and expense Lord Benbreck had been attracted, coaxed, it might almost be said, into the family fold, and if anything happened to make him break bars and fly in fright or disgust, there would be furious trouble.

Pamela, too, had her place in the tangle, and must be conciliated. As for Kenneth, he seemed to be a piece in the game only in so far as his conduct and influence affected others. Carew put his feet on the table in the philosophic American manner, and thought intensely in the heart of a thick cloud of tobacco smoke.

"This is diplomacy," he told himself, pulling yet harder in the energy of his thought. "Yes, I guess this is diplomacy all right; and like Topsy's measles, of the very worstest kind," he added, in reference to family quarrels and social ambitions.

He came out of the smoke with a multitude of confused ideas and one clear purpose. Whatever happened or did not happen, the bouquet should go to

Faces in the Mist

Kinleath, and he would be the bearer. The deed done, he would face the music. Elsie's smile was worth all hazards.

Just as he was stepping into the motor rather more eager than was consistent with the American reputation for coolness, his father strolled upon the scene.

"Where are you off to now?" Mr. Fairhurst asked; then, spying the bouquet, "Hullo, what's this?"

"Flowers, I guess, father," Carew answered, valorously trying not to blush. "As you know, Miss Chisholm had to leave early last night, and I thought this would be a nice way of expressing our regret."

"H'mph, your regret, you mean. Don't know that anybody else particularly regretted her early departure. Does your mother know of this?"

"I—I don't think she does, sir; didn't fancy she'd care to know."

"Just a little deal on your own account, eh?"

A strange excitement seized Carew. He was in terror lest his father should begin to ask questions. But apparently Mr. Fairhurst was not sufficiently interested for that. Instead, he examined the bouquet, an armful of the choicest flowers ever grown at the expense of a millionaire, with some degree of wonder.

"Say, are you taking a couple of hired men to carry this in when it reaches its destination?" he asked. Carew laughed.

"I knew, sir, we couldn't afford to be mean."

"And I guess you've provided pretty effectually against any suspicion of that kind," returned Mr. Fairhurst. "Did you make the selection yourself?"

"Callum, the gardener, helped me."

"He did, eh? I had an idea the old man was a perfect miser with his flowers. Was he liberal on compulsion?"

"No, sir, I assure you he was not," Carew answered, glad to get in the naked truth.

Enlightenment

"Then I was wronging him. He's positively generous; in fact, I may say he's lavish. And the taste seems all right. By the way, young Chisholm is leaving soon, isn't he?"

"Yes, I believe he is."

"Ask him over to smoke a cigar with us before going, or, better still, invite him to dinner. I like what I have seen of him. Guess he's got grit. What is he exactly?"

"Something abroad, in Egypt, or somewhere round there; don't know precisely where or what."

"If he doesn't get killed, reckon he'll get on. Well, I'd trot round and tell your mother about this if I were you. She'd like to know. Women are made that way."

But for some inexplicable reason Carew was not able to find his mother till the bouquet had been presented, and then the matter was mentioned casually as a kind of side incident. But it was no side incident to Mrs. Fairhurst.

"Oh, been to Kinleath with flowers," she cried. "That's going it strong. Why, may I ask?"

"Well, you see, mother," Carew replied sagely, "if you go and invite people one day, you can't just ignore them the next."

"Oh, can't you?" responded Mrs. Fairhurst. "Guess it's been done. But there's no use trying to gather up spilled milk. They've had their flowers, and let them rest. Don't think I want anything more to do with them."

"Father suggests having Mr. Chisholm to dinner before he leaves," said Carew.

"I'll talk to your father about *that*," responded Mrs. Fairhurst, crisply. "Yes, I'll talk to him about that. And in the meantime I'd advise you to let Kinleath and all about it alone."

It was plain to Carew that neither his father nor

Faces in the Mist

his mother knew of the Benbreck-Chisholm quarrel. When they did come to know of it, well ! there would be earthquakes and floods of tears. Meanwhile how was he to deal with Pamela ? At Kinleath he had cautiously broached the trouble to Kenneth, who begged him to dismiss it from his mind.

"Not much," was his emphatic reply. "This isn't the sort of mistake one is proud to keep going, no, sir. There's a horrible blunder, and I'm going to see it put right."

CHAPTER XVII

A BITTER REVENGE

HE did not explain how he obtained his information, but Kenneth easily guessed the good offices of Callum. In any case Carew knew the facts, and was on fire as a peacemaker. But when he came to close quarters with Pamela, she was still too angry, still smarted too actually from the feeling of disgrace and resentment, to heed reason.

"I want to hear no more of that," she said peremptorily. "Not a word—not a single word; and you'll oblige me by not mentioning Mr. Chisholm's name any more in my presence."

"Blotted it out of the book of remembrance, eh, Pam?" Carew returned. "Well, you'd better think it all over. He's coming here again."

"Coming here again!" she repeated angrily. "How do you know? Who has invited him?"

"I have. Father wants him. The invitation was on his behalf."

"Then father doesn't understand," said Pamela, hotly. "The invitation must be cancelled."

"That would be awkward," observed Carew, slowly. "Might involve unpleasant explanations."

"Awkward or not, it must be done. It's impossible he should come here. He mustn't—he simply mustn't."

"Better talk to father, then," said Carew. "Don't know how it is, but he's taken a mighty fancy to Chisholm."

Instead, she flew with a flaming heart to a mother

Faces in the Mist

who would understand and approve with something more than common joy. Midway, however, she changed her mind. Better wait; better keep her own counsel pending the development of events. If Kenneth proved himself so utterly devoid of all proper pride and manliness as to intrude again where his presence would be an offence, she could refuse to see him. If that were not enough she could afterwards, in a dramatic moment to be fitly chosen, flash out the revelation that would forever make it impossible for a Chisholm to show face at Bruan Castle. It depended on himself whether she should be forced to that extreme measure. If he had an iota of right feeling in his composition, he would never again darken her father's door. Could he be shamed, or must he be stung into dignity and self-respect?

All this bore oddly on one whose characteristic weakness was a pride so sensitive, so inflammable, that at times it sniffed affronts and took fire without cause. Pride! he was compact of pride; at the least suspicion of insult it tingled in every nerve, throbbed in every artery. People said, "Slight him once, and there'll be no need to do it a second time," and shook the head over a sense of personal honour and dignity so quixotic. Yet he accepted. For all her courage, Pamela was momentarily stupefied by the news. Kenneth Chisholm coming to Bruan, after what had happened! She must be dreaming—the situation was too horrible for reality.

Like a hunted thing she had an instinct to fly—to London, to the Continent, to some of her many friends just then scattered over Scotland, anywhere from an intolerable, a hideous position. Then the real Pamela reasserted herself.

"Why should I do anything of the sort?" she reflected, with a mental squaring of the shoulders. "I am on my own ground, and I'll stand."

A Bitter Revenge

If he did not know what became a gentleman, she would teach him. Lord Benbreck had left. In the heat of resentment it occurred to her to send for him, that he might have the satisfaction of facing and humiliating his enemy in public. That counsel, luckily, did not prevail.

Why, then, did Kenneth accept? Because he concluded, after some hard thinking, that Mr. Fairhurst had discovered the truth, and was making amends in his own way—a way that seemed characteristic and generous. In this view, to refuse would be to prove himself a churl, and churlishness was never the Chisholm temper. Besides—and here was the gist of the whole matter—he desired to learn for himself that Pamela exonerated him from blame, and, exonerating, forgave.

In the interval before dinner he awaited her appearance with a secret fluttering which he found it hard to conceal. Then it was explained that a violent headache compelled her to keep to her own room. But, as if to atone for her absence, host and hostess were studiously gracious, and Carew was more than cordial. No one referred even remotely to the Benbreck affair. Did they know of it? Kenneth argued that they must, and silence was their delicate method of letting an unpleasant incident slip into oblivion.

"Kind of them, at any rate," he thought.

Doubtless, Pamela, too, knew the truth, and had corrected her false judgment. It was unfortunate she was prevented from making that known by manner, if not actually in words. But the situation must have been extraordinarily trying, and he readily understood the headache. It meant racked nerves, perhaps a heart smitten with remorse.

Were she an ordinary girl, whose thoughts were as frivolous, fleeting and capricious as the fashions

Faces in the Mist

in hats, it would be different. Unless he was completely deceived, she took serious things seriously, brooding, it might be, over fancied errors or wrongdoings, and under the sting of conscience magnifying them out of all reason. She had been furiously angry with him; the revulsion when she discovered her mistake would therefore be correspondingly violent. Would he could tell her that he understood all, and found her conduct perfectly consistent and natural! So he thought and reflected through the small talk that bears the name of conversation at fashionable dinner-tables.

For two hours at least he enjoyed this delectable dream, and then it vanished suddenly, as is the manner of dreams. Vexed, restless, chafed by a hundred conflicting feelings not all of the order imagined by Kenneth, Pamela could not remain within the bounds of her own room. Taking what she thought a safe opportunity of getting to another part of the castle, she ventured downstairs. She reached the bottom noiselessly, and was on the point of turning swiftly aside, when all at once, as if fate lay in wait, a door opened and Kenneth appeared.

At sight of her he stopped, half bowing, expectantly for a greeting. Their eyes met, and like a struck flint Pamela's shot fire. The next instant, without word or sign of recognition, she wheeled and swept on. The rebuke, the scorn, flashed as by lightning, struck him to stone. Luckily, no one else saw or guessed what happened; but his host, coming up a moment later, found him rigid, breathless and deathly white.

"Mr. Chisholm, you are ill!" said Mr. Fairhurst, in manifest alarm.

"It is nothing," returned Kenneth, with a suppressed shudder.

"A little more than nothing, I guess," was the



"THE NEXT INSTANT . . SHE WHEELED AND SWEEPED ON."

A Bitter Revenge

kindly response. "Come with me. A drop of good brandy is in order, I reckon."

Kenneth would have protested, were not protest too ridiculous to impose on a child.

"I suppose it's some lingering effect of my accident," he said feebly. "I've been through more. It's absurd."

Till that minute he would have held it incredible that a woman's look, however charged with disdain and repudiation, would have disabled him so. He, a man of action, well-accustomed to peril, to go down in that fashion before the fire of a girl's eyes! It was preposterous. He felt like one ambushed and shot in proof of his own blindness and folly. Ugh! In a spasm of self-disgust he tried to pull himself together.

"All right now, thanks," he said, drawing breath after the stimulant.

"Your looks don't exactly confirm that statement just yet," remarked Mr. Fairhurst, sympathetically. "Have a rest."

"I assure you I am all right," Kenneth insisted weakly. His face was ghastly, and the cold sweat gleamed on his forehead.

As soon as it could be effected with decency he made his escape. Carew saw him off, and then sought out Pamela.

"Happened to see anything of Chisholm to-night, Pam?" he asked with winning innocence.

"Yes, I saw him," was the reply.

"Imph! thought so." Carew had been putting two and two together and drawing inferences.

"Why did you think so?" Pamela asked frigidly.

"Because he's gone away sicker than any man I ever saw, after being well and cheerful. Saw him by chance, and cut him dead, I reckon?"

Faces in the Mist

"Yes, saw him by chance and cut him dead—as he deserved."

"Did you forget he was a guest?"

"No, he forgot that once. You know I have the best of reasons for what I did."

Carew sucked in his under lip reflectively.

"Think you're right, Pam?" he asked doubtfully.

"Right!" she repeated. "Right! How can you ask?"

"Well, I'll just tell you," Carew replied, with the aspect of one whose sole desire in life is to follow truth. "If you have patience I'll just tell you. It happens that I know the facts, and you've been rushed to wrong conclusions. If you had condescended to listen to me I would have told you sooner and saved a lot of bother."

She regarded him with intense, widening eyes.

"What do you mean?" she asked, instantly taking the defensive.

"What I say. You have been doing Chisholm a cruel wrong, Pam. Upon my honour you have."

"Who told you that?"

"One who knows. One who was an eye-witness of what took place the other evening outside."

"I was myself an eye-witness and know exactly what took place. Is—is this Mr. Chisholm's story you are giving me?"

"No, it is not Mr. Chisholm's story. Mr. Chisholm hasn't said a word about it; too proud, I guess. Don't think he'd defend himself even if he had the chance."

"Then who told you?"

"Callum. He saw everything."

"Callum," echoed Pamela, contemptuously. "Callum is either a blind or a crafty partisan, I don't know which, and would perjure himself any day."

It was Callum's stories that fanned the first small

A Bitter Revenge

flame of romance, and the offence was not to be forgiven.

"The old man is fond of the Chisholms, certainly," Carew owned. "Have you thought what his loyalty means?"

"No, I really haven't troubled."

"Might be worth while as a study in human relations, Pam. The world, I understand, hasn't gone very well with the Chisholms, and they had to get rid of him. Does he resent it, or think of revenge? On the contrary, he'd give his last cent of hard-earned money to them. More than that, I verily believe he'd give his life for them if the sacrifice would do any good. Do you think unworthy people could inspire devotion like that? Never, if they tried through all eternity. Callum's devotion is the most splendid testimonial any family could receive."

"I didn't think anyone could put sand in your eyes, Carew," she remarked ironically.

"And I guess you're right, Pam. Reckon I can tell when a man lays aside his conscience and manufactures facts for the occasion, and when he's solid for the truth, saying just what he knows without fear or favour. I'm not as old as Methuselah, but I wasn't born yesterday, and so far as I can see, Callum doesn't profit by his championship. Take it from me that as sure as you're standing on shoe leather, Kenneth Chisholm is more sinned against than sinning in this business."

"But I saw him," she insisted. "What's the use of talking? I saw him."

"You saw part of what happened. You saw Benbreck rising, but you didn't see him going down, and you don't know why he went down. And the going down, not the rising, is the crucial fact in the case. You believe Chisholm assaulted Benbreck. It was the other way about. Benbreck assaulted Chisholm."

Faces in the Mist

He may have had provocation. When enemies meet they don't, as a rule, indulge in mutual courtesies. But Benbreck was the aggressor. Chisholm's act was wholly one of self-defence. You have only to think of the matter to see you must be wrong. Consider the capabilities of the two men. Great ginger! Pam, Chisholm could swallow Benbreck whole, almost, without being aware of it."

Pamela was breathing hard. She was excited and perplexed. But with a woman's tenacity she clung to her position.

"Is all this the result of taking flowers to Miss Chisholm?" she inquired. "I warn you to be careful, my dear brother, or you may have as much cause for regret as I have."

"It's the result of a sort of latent prejudice for fair play," was the retort. "As to Miss Chisholm, I'm of Callum's mind that there are very few like her, and that on the whole I'm not disposed to hear a word against her. And look here, Pam, don't you go side-tracking your notions of justice. It's not like you, and it don't pay in the end. I know you better than you know yourself, and it's not in you to be unfair."

"That's what I think myself," she agreed. "And that's why I won't have Lord Benbreck wronged in his absence. Take it that I know what I'm about, Carew, and that I don't need any instructions how to do my duty."

And with that she turned majestically on her heel. She knew who was to blame! Why should she listen to partisans?—a question that her mother in this instance would certainly have applauded.

CHAPTER XVIII

TOO LATE

FOR the next few days Pamela bent to the hardest task she had ever undertaken. She had to judge in a matter of crucial, it might be of eternal, moment, not as one weighing evidence with a free, dispassionate mind, but as one whose tenderest feelings are lacerated, whose closest interests are touched at every turn. How could she who had no pretence to be a casuist hope to unravel the tangle of thought and emotion, right and wrong, in which the issue was involved, how apportion blame, render justice to others and to herself?

Woman-like, she took counsel of her heart and went on bravely, though the effort to hold the delicate scales even between man and man cost her many headaches and not a few heartaches to boot. The hot pursuit of fashion and pleasure at their hottest and costliest, palled on her. The grandeur of grandees and the smartness of the smart bored her. Over cards she was listless when she was not spasmodically excited; frocks, millinery and sport lost their fascination until, remembering the duty of a millionaire's daughter, she spurred herself like a jaded horse. She grew wan. In repose her face became wistfully sad. When off her guard it seemed that the merry Pamela had lost all her merriment. Yet she was resolute to do the right, which being interpreted means that with feminine insistence, feminine obstinacy some might have said,

Faces in the Mist

she held to her point of view. She was mistaken in Kenneth, and for that mistake he must be punished. The judge could not help being a woman.

Carew's story she took as the result of infatuation. There was the glamour on his eyes which for a little had been on her own. But she rubbed hers clear, or rather they were rudely cleared for her, while he, poor fool, went on cherishing delusion. Of course, he meant to be strictly accurate. To his sister, Carew's honour was above suspicion, only he was deceived by mirages and allowed himself to dream fantastic fairy dreams.

So in the first fierce mood she reasoned. Then, as she reviewed the situation more calmly, doubt began to sap the foundation of unalterable resolve. Was it, she asked herself timidly, was it possible, after all, there was truth in what Carew said? Next came the stinging question, was it all truth? Benbreck the aggressor! Benbreck and not Kenneth forgetting honour and outraging the laws of hospitality! If true that altered everything. Why did men quarrel, and why, oh why, was she called to be arbiter in such a case? Why, it may be added, did she falter in her fixed intention? Had the glamour, in fact, wholly gone from her eyes as she had supposed, or, having gone, was it stealing back? Vexed and troubled, Pamela sighed the old, old sigh of her sex. Ah! these men, these men!

The problem was still in the acute and baffling stage when a week later she motored with a departing lady guest to a railway station fifteen miles distant in almost as many minutes. That day she steeled herself to lightness partly in revolt against her own confused and chaotic state of mind, but chiefly as an answer to those who were making a tragic jest of her pallor and absent-mindedness. Even at the cost of being openly, flagrantly frivolous, she would prove

Too Late

to them the utter stupidity of their tiresome rallery about heart trouble.

The old Pamela seemed, indeed, to take her seat at the wheel that morning. She had a blithe and ready word for all, and her small, firm, white teeth shone in frequent laughter. Her father noted the brightness, spied a zest for adventure, and thought well to give warning against excessive speed. The small gloved hand gripped the wheel a little tighter.

"I have been out with a motor before," she smiled back at him. "Besides, Highland roads aren't exactly as crowded as the streets of London or New York."

The air vibrated with the throb of the engine, which seemed an apt symbol of Pamela's ardour and impatience.

"Right, dear?" she asked, as soon as the departing guest was up beside her.

"Right," answered the other, scarcely getting time to wave her adieux.

Pamela leaned forward eagerly, and the sixty horsepower took the road with a sudden thrill and leap. Fifteen minutes later and twelve miles out, a scandalised policeman grabbed his notebook, but perceiving in good time who drove, thrust it back into his pocket unused. Passing like a gust of wind, Pamela nodded and smiled as though she understood, and he saluted gallantly. A wise man knows his friends, and so long as the big folk at Bruan killed no one in their careering the law might well turn a conveniently blind eye. But he stopped to look after the flying vision.

"She's a dandy," he told himself rather in admiration than censure. "Many a man would be out of his wits with fear at the thought of driving like that. And they say she's going to be Countess of Dundalloch some day. There'll be ploys then, I'm thinking. Ay, them that lives will likely see things." The Dun-

Faces in the Mist

dallochs fell within the scope of his jurisdiction, and he had fond hopes of the future Countess.

Similar thoughts were uppermost in the mind of the departing guest.

"And you'll take particular care of Lord B.," she remarked, in the midst of tender farewells at the station. "He's not an every-day plant."

"Oh!" returned Pamela, with a fine assumption of indifference. "I reckon he's a kind of plant that is constructed to take care of itself. The family has contrived to exist for some considerable time now."

"You may say that," agreed the departing guest. "One of the oldest in the whole kingdom, and also one of the best. And somebody's all devotion. There now, don't tell me he isn't, for I know better. It's a wonder he manages to endure his absence. Well! I can guess what he dreams about. I congratulate you, dear. You're a lucky girl."

"Why do you say that?" The other laughed meaningly.

"Pretending with *me*," she cried. "There, don't blush. I shall look eagerly for the announcement; only you might tell me yourself before it gets into print."

"I will," said Pamela.

"Thank you, dear; that's so nice of you. I repeat you're a lucky girl. To-day there are two royal roads to the heart—the inner circle, the holy of holies of the British peerage. The first and best is to be American born. You Americans are simply irresistible. The second is to simper and prance in by way of the stage—the variety kind by preference."

"That's your chance, dear," was on Pamela's tongue; but she lacked the cruelty to give the retort utterance. Instead of delivering the obvious stroke, she laughed carelessly. Had she not discharged her

Too Late

mind of all vexation for that day at least, put the past away from her?

The Highland express came in with the urgency of extreme haste and the suggested bustle of far away cities. The departing guest took her seat and Pamela was talking gaily through the open window, when of a sudden she was conscious of a tall figure passing swiftly behind her. The departing guest popped out her head.

"Mr. Chisholm," she said, "passing without seeing you, too. Has he gone blind?"

Like one in mortal terror of looking, yet under an uncanny spell unable to abstain, Pamela turned her head just in time to see him enter a carriage a little distance ahead. From her expression she might have seen an apparition. For a moment her whole being was suspended as by the shock of fear or amazement; then her heart began to pound dizzily, while train and station and hills showed a mad disposition to skip.

"I declare, travelling by this train," said the departing guest. "Wish I had time to change, for the sake of company. Go to him, dear, and tell him how stupid he is. Quick, or the train will be off!"

"No," replied Pamela, struggling to keep steady. "I—I won't."

"If he doesn't see me, why should I trouble about him?" she reflected wildly, forgetting the reason for his blindness.

"Nobody seeing him off," said the departing guest. "Seems lonely and neglected in the circumstances."

"Men hate a fuss," returned Pamela, sagely.

"Probably wouldn't let anyone come."

"Then you go and give him a surprise," persisted the departing guest; "and see whether he'll hate that."

Faces in the Mist

"No," repeated Pamela. "He wouldn't like me either."

The other looked down quickly and curiously.

"Anything the matter, dear?" she asked in alarm, noticing that Pamela was white to the lips. Pamela did not hear. There was a fierce ringing in her ears; her heart beat as if it would escape from its place.

"I will go," she said, after a pause, as it seemed desperately. "Yes, I will go. Excuse me a moment."

She ran forward; but in the same moment the guard's whistle blew, and the train was off even before the great yellow engine gave its perfunctory toot. Pamela felt her limbs failing and the breath choking in her throat. With a quivering sense of disaster, of doom, she ran faster, and got just far enough to catch a glimpse of Kenneth in his corner, his face set and very white. He did not see her in return.

"I told you the train would be off," the departing guest called from the moving carriage. "I'll see him later on the journey and tell him."

"Please don't," Pamela returned, as it seemed, in a voice of anguish. "Don't tell him."

"Then I won't, dear. Good-bye, good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Pamela, scarcely able to breathe.

She stood looking after the train as long as it was in view.

"Too late," she murmured tragically. "Too late. I may never see him again, never again."

When she turned to go her eyes were swimming in tears. She was the lonely one.

BOOK II

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

A STARTLING DISCOVERY

As the playground of the idle rich during the brief season of sport, the Highlands are depopulated in winter. Grey, dank October puts the butterflies to flight. They see the sky's gloom, they see the mists now creeping with ghostly stealth from behind distant bens, now sweeping down in great wreaths to possess the lowlands in a drizzling, sodden desolation. Likewise they behold the gashed hillsides foaming in embrowned cascades, and the valleys, meadows and moors turn visibly to lagoons and quagmires. The roar of turbulent waters is in their ears, the chill of wet winds in their blood and bones. They shudder and fly to other playgrounds.

The Fairhursts scuttled with the rest, first to London to dip for a short while with golden spoons into that amorphous honey-pot, and then whithersoever the tide of pleasure might carry them. Mr. Fairhurst timidly suggested a return to New York for the winter. The unregenerate Adam in him was in truth pining for old scenes and ways, the free, exhilarating bustle of the West, the electric contact of hustlers vibrating through and through with the dynamic currents of life. He was finding it a dismal pastime to sit inanely passive in the midst of foreign grandeur, smiling at vapidty, suppressing yawns, in a word, acting the hypocrite by feigning an interest he could never feel in the vacuity of the thing called Fashion.

Faces in the Mist

"And they call it pleasure," he commented, drearily. Pleasure! One hour of the old rousing life, with brain pitted against brain, and failure for the hindmost, was worth a millennium of such arid enjoyment. "Give me back the old incentives," his heart cried; "give me again the keen joy of competition; let me do something."

But alas! for man's yearnings when opposed to woman's ambitions. When the proposal was submitted to his wife she disposed of it with one ravishing smile.

"You don't mean it, Rube," she beamed. "You can't. New York! why New York is fast becoming one of the best places in the world to leave."

He opened his eyes as over an incredible heresy.

"Why?" he asked.

"Why?" she repeated, with a trill of laughter.

"Rube, you're really not keeping abreast of things, you really are not. Anybody who's up to date can tell you that New York is provincial, an antiquated second-hand edition of London or Paris."

"Not so long ago you thought otherwise, Susannah," he observed.

"Didn't know any better, I guess. But we learn as we go along. There's so much to be seen and done over here that we must really see and do if we're going to be tony. And that's the business on hand, I guess, isn't it?"

He dodged the point by remarking that there was a good deal in their own country they had not yet seen.

"If it's scenery you want," he said, "there's the Yellowstone and Yosemite, and Niagara too, practically; for all we have seen of it has been from a railroad car."

"The Yellowstone and Yosemite will keep," returned Mrs. Fairhurst, crisply.

"So," responded Mr. Fairhurst, ruefully; "reckon

A Startling Discovery

it will. But I'm beginning to doubt if I'll keep. I'm getting stale over here ; feel like a pond that gathers green scum from want of healthy movement. Wasn't made for this kind of stagnant elegance, I reckon. I'm a failure as a man of fashion, that's a fact. You stay over here, Susannah, with the children, and fix up things to please yourself. Let me go back."

"So you would desert me, Rube," rejoined Mrs. Fairhurst, reproachfully. "What would you go back for?"

"Because I'm no good in a society that counts it the worst possible form to do anything useful, or show any enthusiasm or energy, or rational intelligence. I like to let myself go occasionally. Feel at times like hollerin' in their drawing-rooms, only I mustn't. It wouldn't be tony. The upper classes over here have been brought up to polite and gilded idleness. They're used to it, and have the pull over me."

"Oh, you'll get used to it, too, Rube," his wife told him consolingly. "You'll ge^t used to it all right."

The crucial fact was, that in any case it had to be. The great mission was not to be abandoned because of any fantastic distaste or prejudice. And in face of that resolution Mr. Fairhurst knew better than to raise the standard of rebellion.

Carew would have been content with London plus Paris, with an occasional visit to Bruan, for sake of its proximity to Kinleath, of which he found himself thinking tenderly when alone. But adventure being for the young, he offered no objections to his mother's plan of going further afield. Pamela, too, was perfectly pliant. She would go anywhere, agree to anything. But she assented as one whose thoughts are of other things, or whose springs of being are relaxed and out of gear.

"Anything you like, mother," she said, when consulted. Perhaps Mrs. Fairhurst did not expect this

Faces in the Mist

instant docility, or it may be something in the tone, some hint of languor or indifference struck her. At any rate, she looked critically at her daughter.

"It's nice of you to be so agreeable, Pam," she said; "but somehow you don't seem much interested. Are you not well? Has anything upset you?"

"What could upset me, mother? Haven't we everything?"

"Just so. Haven't we everything? And if there's anything we haven't got we'd like, all we have to do is to go right away and get it."

"Yes, we have all that money can buy."

"And I guess that's mostly all that's worth having in this world, Pam."

"Yes," Pamela agreed, languidly; "by common reckoning I guess that's so."

Had she obeyed her instinct she would have protested hotly against the sentiment. But she held her peace, not daring to give her thoughts and feelings rein.

"Don't you have any doubt about it," pursued Mrs. Fairhurst with the emphasis of absolute conviction. "Sit down and tot up things, and you'll find there isn't much going round worth having that money won't buy. And your purse brims over, doesn't it?"

"Yes, mother."

"In fact, you're just about the luckiest girl alive to-day; yet somehow or other you don't seem happy."

"I'm all right, mother. Don't you go worrying over me."

"Trying not to, though it's not so easy as you might think. Seems almost as if you had something on your mind."

Pamela affected to laugh.

"You're developing too much imagination, mother," she said.

A Startling Discovery

"I have eyes, and use them," was the response. "I was beginning to fear there was something wrong—some trouble between you and Lord Benbreck. There isn't, is there, Pam?"

"No," answered Pamela, with deliberate emphasis; "no trouble whatever."

Mrs. Fairhurst drew a deep breath of relief. Thank goodness his lordship was not slipping away, as she dreaded he might be. But she was hardly off one rack when she was on another, and a worse.

At a club of very exclusive exclusives, to which nothing but rank or unbounded wealth could gain admission, it chanced she took a hand at bridge. After the play, a duchess, who made cards the serious vocation of life, and to whom Mrs. Fairhurst had the felicity of handing over a small heap of gold, remarked pleasantly, she wished everybody were as prompt in settlement. The two were in a corner by themselves, and could talk.

"Aren't they?" asked Mrs. Fairhurst, with an inflection that implied she would rather die than leave a debt of honour unsettled.

"No, indeed," replied the duchess; "and it's getting worse and worse. Why it'll soon be that even at bridge one can't get one's own. You'd be surprised at the number of I.O.U.'s that are floating about, and the people who give them. I call it disgraceful."

Mrs. Fairhurst politely hoped her Grace had not suffered to any extent.

"And indeed then I have," was the reply. "I could buy myself a nice new yacht with all the latest up-to-date fittings if everybody paid up. My list of debtors would amaze you. For instance, there is——," and then in the sanctity of confidential intercourse Lord Benbreck's name was breathed. "Poor fellow," sighed the duchess. "It's a pity, a great pity how he's going."

Faces in the Mist

"What do you mean?" Mrs. Fairhurst asked, a new terror at her heart.

"Why, haven't you heard?" was the reply. "I thought everybody knew. Another of his appalling fits of impecuniosity; and as these things get worse by repetition, like the little sins preachers scold us about, this one is naturally the worst he has ever had. I'm in dread of catastrophe and revelations; then we should all be in a pretty mess. Fine thing for the newspapers and the canaille to gloat over our doings, wouldn't it?"

Mrs. Fairhurst was properly and genuinely horrified.

"But doesn't his father help him out?" she inquired.

The duchess laughed.

"Evidently, you don't know his father. Dundalloch is about as hard to bleed as a bit of Scotch granite, was almost going to law over his son's allowance; swore he wouldn't contribute another penny to maintain the follies of an arrant scapegrace and spendthrift. And the fun of the thing is, he is tarred with precisely the same stick himself. How excellently we all preach, my dear, so long as the preaching doesn't touch ourselves. When it does, then hey! to the winds with precept. Besides, Dundalloch is just as hard up as his son; lives continually on the brink of disaster more or less."

"Thought the Dundalloch estates were rich," said Mrs. Fairhurst, softly questing for information.

"So they are; but it's mostly mortgagees that benefit. You see, many generations of the Dundallochs have gone with the most praiseworthy consistency on the principle of having a good time, and the policy always comes costly in the end. As a consequence poor Dundalloch's existence is one long financial crisis. No; Benbreck is not at all likely to screw succour out of his adored papa. What

A Startling Discovery

he really needs is someone—some nice girl for example—who would take him in hand, and get his debts paid off for him. American girls are frequently very kind in that way. I really don't know what some of us would do without them. You Americans are wonderful. Does everybody in America own a gold mine?"

"Guess the sort of arrangement you mention is satisfactory all round," responded Mrs. Fairhurst, blushing the blush of modest worth.

"As fair as anything can be in love and war, I daresay," beamed the duchess. "In this world we must pay for everything—even for the marriages that are made in heaven. Well, Benbreck's in sore need of somebody to lead him to the altar. There's been a good deal of talk over his affairs lately."

"And in the normal course what would be the result?" Mrs. Fairhurst asked, artfully suppressing her emotion.

"Oh! as I've just indicated, a thumping scandal," the duchess replied. "Something to make us of the Upper Ten sit up, I tell you. It's a compliment to rank that nothing tickles the masses more than a scandal in high life. If Benbreck is to be kept out of the mud, he must be taken in hand pretty quickly, that's all."

And she beamed upon Mrs. Fairhurst as though to say, "I know what you're here for. There's your chance. As you cherish social ambition and hope for social salvation, don't let it pass."

CHAPTER II

"WITH ALL LIABILITIES"

MRS. FAIRHURST went away much perturbed. Here was a turn of events for which her calculations did not provide. Lord Benbreck dripping with mud! Already she felt the arrows of shame piercing her.

But to the bold and resourceful, difficulties are but opportunities. Mrs. Fairhurst's dauntless mind leaped to the occasion like a hound at its quarry. Having considered the position carefully with herself, she took her husband in hand. He listened patiently while she unfolded her schemes, and expatiated on the glorious chance which had providentially come to them, yes, she could not help saying providentially.

When she finished, he remarked quietly: "So far as I can see, Susannah, your proposition means two things: first a formal engagement between Pam and Benbreck; next a statement of liabilities. Taking it as a business affair, the statement of liabilities ought to come first, I reckon. With that before us we'll have some idea of what we're doing."

"I don't understand you, Rube," his wife returned in manifest disappointment.

"There's no mystery, Susannah. What I mean is this: that if I'm to buy a son-in-law it's only right I should have some notion what he's going to cost me; and the terms being stated, whether in the particular instance before us the article is worth the figure."

"I wish you wouldn't be so commercial, Rube,"

"With all Liabilities"

his wife protested. "It's not considered tony over here. The question is simply this: Do you or do you not want Pam to have a title?"

"Depends, Susannah, depends. Hitherto in considering any little venture brought to my notice, it has always been my method first to get particulars, and then to figure how the thing is likely to pan out. That's not tony, as you say; but it's my way of doing things, and it has enabled me to get along fairly well so far. If I knew a better perhaps I'd try to change, but I don't; and I reckon this deal must be taken in the usual way."

"Don't talk like that, Rube," his wife coaxed. "You know this is entirely different from anything you've ever been in before."

"Exactly so, Susannah. It's quite a new sort of speculation for me, and that's why it needs more than the ordinary amount of thinking over. You see, it's like this: If a common ordinary transaction turns out badly you can cut your loss and clear out; but if I got into this, and the thing's a failure, why, you see, I'm landed. An undesirable son-in-law is a kind of stock you can't unload simply by instructing your broker to sell at whatever price the pesky thing may fetch. No, it's an investment you've got to take for better or worse. Then there's Pam to think of. Suppose things go as you propose, and don't turn out just O.K., what then? I don't fancy the divorce court as a means of correcting mistakes. I've always had a clean record, Susannah. Perhaps a clean record's not tony; but I was brought up on it, stuck to it right along to the best of my ability; and I kind of like what I've been used to."

"Then do you want Lord Benbreck to come and tell you about his debts?" Mrs. Fairhurst asked, not without a suspicion of asperity.

"If he'd like me to pay them," was the placid answer.

Faces in the Mist

"Otherwise, of course, he needn't trouble. It's not business, Susannah, to sign a blank cheque and hand it over to be filled up at somebody else's direction."

"Don't you like Lord Benbreck then, Rube? Can't you trust him?"

"Nice enough young fellow to go out shooting with, and have round in one's house, and all that. Quite tony, I know, as his debts prove. But I'm bound to confess, Susannah, that if I wanted a new head for a department in New York, I'd cipher out probabilities before appointing a man whose only credentials to character and ability are a big pile of debts, run up, I don't know how, though I may guess it's not by running Sunday-schools or charity organisations. But I'm ready to go into it. It'll let us see what he does with himself as a general thing, and what his price is. Better invite him to a conference."

"But we're leaving London immediately," Mrs. Fairhurst objected. "There's no time to have it arranged properly."

"Then take him with you," rejoined Mr. Fairhurst. "Guess he won't object to an outing, and no doubt he and I can find a chance to discuss things."

"You make me feel like a pirate, Rube," Mrs. Fairhurst smiled, instantly seeing the advantages of the proposal. But the sense of piracy did not prevent her from acting promptly on her husband's suggestion.

Benbreck, too, sought counsel—that is to say, with filial propriety he submitted the invitation to his father, who happened to be spending a little time at his London house. The Earl's advice was prompt and emphatic.

"Accept," he said; "accept by all means. They want to catch you, of course; and as things are you might do worse than allow yourself to be caught—with due regard to the decencies. They're prodigiously rich, that's clear. That carnival at Bruan beat

"With all Liabilities"

the peerage into a cocked hat. It was stupendous, flamboyant perhaps, but stupendous. Money could go no further. Their blood isn't first-rate, and their manners cannot be called the last thing in finish. But they have full purses, and you know the state of ours."

"Too well," Benbreck smiled. "Only I thought you were always a stickler for blood and birth."

"So I was," his father owned. "So I was. But I have discovered that in these times man cannot always live in comfort by birth and blood alone. As one gets older, and especially as one gets poorer, one is forced to abandon some of the fine ideals of youth. A pity; but so it is. For the present, I'm entirely with the fellow in the play, 'Put money in thy purse.' Admirable advice. Sums up the law and the prophets so far as this world is concerned. 'Put money in thy purse.' Your mother would think of it all with horror if she were alive. But times change. If there's anything in example we have plenty to guide and encourage us."

He ran over a list of illustrious members of the nobility who did not disdain to accept plebeian wealth. "If they go with the times," he asked, pertinently, "why shouldn't we? By the way, how are things with you at the moment? Any better?"

"Worse, if possible," was the calm reply. Benbreck could afford to be philosophic. After all, his debts mostly affected other people.

"Heh!" said the Earl between a smile and a frown; "been doing anything in particular just lately?"

"A little."

"Where? How?"

"Race-course, prize-ring, cards, Stock Exchange," Benbreck replied laconically.

"Enterprising, at any rate," commented the Earl. "The whole range of betting and gambling pretty well. And the result?"

Faces in the Mist

"Some winnings and more losses."

"Umph! Took the winnings in cash and gave bills for the losses, I suppose?"

"Precisely."

"Oh, you're getting on. Well, has your bread begun to come back to you over the waters?"

"With a rush—positively a rush. I nearly set fire to my room the other day burning notes of demand and legal threats. My creditors grow outrageous."

"It's a way creditors have; and what's worse, the law supports them. To the more pressing I suppose you give new bills for old ones, with something added to the amounts by way of solace?"

"Exactly, father."

"The old game, the old old game, promising Satan a bigger meal to-morrow if he'll forbear eating you to-day? Does your conscience ever prick you?" Benbreck laughed.

"Never," he answered frankly. "Never that I know of."

Dundalloch gazed at his son a moment in something like admiration. Undoubtedly the boy was a chip of the old block.

"Gives no trouble, eh! Well, creditors are seldom so courteous or obliging, and in the end they prevail, more or less. To evade a pack of wolves you'd better go with these people. Only let your wits be alert. Keep your weather eye on finance, and let no final arrangement be made without consulting me. In the rough and tumble of things I'm getting to know the value of money. If they mean business they've got to take you over with all liabilities, plus an allowance—something handsome, too, by jove! or I kick. You understand?"

"Perfectly, father. I've got to marry money. Miss Fairhurst has heaps of it, and is therefore eligible."

"Fastidious people might say that was rather

"With all Liabilities"

brutally put," remarked the Earl; "but it catches my meaning quite accurately. If ever you're in doubt, if ever you're inclined to waver, remind yourself what a million or so would do for us. Remember, too, that the adage 'when poverty comes in at the door, love flies out at the window,' applies to a castle as well as a cottage—more, I honestly believe more."

"Am I expected to help you, then, father?" Benbreck inquired innocently.

"So far as I can see we sink or swim together," was the reply. "But let that pass. Help yourself first. You've come somewhat early in life to need aid pretty badly."

"The family virtues flowering in me prematurely, perhaps," observed Benbreck nonchalantly.

"Some of them; but don't get vain. Attend to your own interest for the present. If your exchequer should overflow—which would indeed be a novel experience—something might dribble into mine. If there's no other remedy for our disease, I may be forced to consider a little venture on my own account; though naturally, at my time of life I'd rather not." And on that understanding they dined together quite cheerfully and amicably.

CHAPTER III

MONTE CARLO AND BANKRUPTCY

HAVING attended to the conventions by accepting Mrs. Fairhurst's invitation, Benbreck lighted a cigar in the solitude of the library, and thought things over.

On the whole the turn of events might be auspicious. He was beginning to feel the need of respite from duns, even at the cost of absenting himself for a space from the felicities of home. Though he felt that a benign Providence created the world exclusively for him and his kind, and was bound in honour to provide for them in a becoming manner, the pinch of his affairs was undoubtedly sharp. Hence he gladly seized the chance first of putting long leagues of sea and land between himself and troublesome creditors, and next of effecting a glorious release from all financial embarrassments. For these purposes Mrs. Fairhurst was as good an angel as he was likely to find. Moreover, there was the inducement of being near Pamela.

He made no mental protestations of burning, inalienable love. The *role* of frenzied lover was one he could never play with any conviction or dignity. If forced to it, as might conceivably happen in a highly satirical world, he could probably act the part quite decently; but he disliked melodramatic outbursts. Both by temperament and education he was against them. He could not imagine himself raving over "the best girl in the world," growing lean

Monte Carlo and Bankruptcy

from hopeless longing, lying awake o' nights with a consuming flame at his heart.

Nevertheless he owned quite frankly that he distinctly liked Pamela, in spite of her origin, and the lingering odour of democracy that clung to her and her family. She was not an aristocrat, that was certain ; but she had character, spirit, charm and beauty. Moreover, she was clever enough to adapt herself to any high honour, any exalted station to which he might be disposed in certain eventualities to call her. Above all, she was rich—fabulously rich.

—“Great Scot! how these middle classes make money,” Benbreck exclaimed mentally. “It’s perfectly astounding.”

Astounding, but extremely convenient. For it appeared the middle classes laboured to amass money in order that the nobility should have the gratification of spending it. That was a dispensation of Providence which had his entire concurrence. Lords, like lilies, should have the privilege of being finely arrayed without toiling or spinning.

Behold, then, Mrs. Fairhurst, once more triumphant. Through the proper channels it was intimated that the Fairhursts were going abroad for a season, and would be accompanied by Lord Benbreck, the popular son and heir of the Earl of Dundaloch. Marked copies of the newspapers containing this important announcement were sent to America, where they were utilised to such excellent purpose that the return mail brought intelligence of the engagement of Miss Fairhurst and Lord Benbreck, who, it was duly stated, “will one day succeed to the ancient Earldom of Dundaloch i. e. the peerage of Great Britain and Ireland.” Illustrative details were given concerning the prospective bridegroom’s family, and the vast wealth of the bride’s father.

The renown of the American journalist has circled

Faces in the Mist

the globe, and here he was at his grandest : " Another conquest in Europe," he exclaimed enthusiastically, " Historic title for a fair daughter of the Republic. British rivals knocked out."

Burke's Peerage, his *vade mecum* in dealing with the British nobility, enabled him, as the pithy vernacular has it, " to spread himself and fake up " a luminous history of the Dundallochs, crammed with rousing and picturesque detail.

" Like Egyptian civilisation," he told his readers, " the beginnings of this noble house are lost in the mists of antiquity. It existed before William the Conqueror was heard of ; it defied Cromwell ; it flourishes with undiminished glory under the latest Edward."

Describing the exploits of American heiresses in Europe, one who might almost be suspected of satirical intent, wrote : " The annexation of Europe proceeds apace. To-day we announce another great and glorious victory. But the statements that arrangements have been completed for abolishing the British Constitution and taking over and running the British House of Lords is, we learn, premature, though it may be expected shortly. It is understood that Windsor Castle, Westminster Abbey and Shakespeare will follow. Bully for the stars and stripes."

Mrs. Fairhurst smiled as she read, with a deep, quiet satisfaction. The jester might jest, and the satirist have his fling ; but she knew with whom the glory lay.

After the proper number and kind of functions her party set off along one of the golden routes of fashion. In making her selection she wished especially to patronise such Continental resorts as are consecrated by royalty. Happily, Europe is well-supplied with Emperors, Kings, and Crown Princes, not to speak

Monte Carlo and Bankruptcy

of minor relatives. Hence Mrs. Fairhurst had no difficulty whatever in making out her list of shrines. Paris was glanced at in the passing; then the triumphal procession included Mentone, Nice, and in particular the lovely principality of Monaco, which includes within its charmed borders the most exquisite delights of the rich man's paradise.

From each stopping-place she wrote piquant letters to privileged friends in New York, just full enough to titillate curiosity, and keep the edge of envy keen. Her correspondents were delicately informed that while she had no desire to belittle New York and its social pretensions, no one desiring to keep in the van of fashion could possibly afford to live there. Once she thought otherwise; once she thought New York the centre of civilisation, the hub and standard of fashion, giving a cue to the elite of the universe; but she was forced to abandon that mistaken, if natural and patriotic notion.

Her real text, however, was Benbreck, and always Benbreck. It was marvellous what a model nobleman he was, how courtly and charming in manner, how splendid in appearance, how exceedingly blue in blood; in fine, how ineffably aristocratic in all his ways. And might she just whisper it in her confidante's ear—he worshipped, fairly worshipped Pamela. Of course, it was not for her to say what that might portend; only she could not help remarking that already he was as one of the family.

It was no part of her plan to help the thriving industry of Monte Carlo. She could not, being who and what she was, countenance gambling; but there could be no harm in looking on just to see how Satan spread his snares. One would thus be the better able to evade them. Besides, was it not an essential part of a tony education to see high life? So she permitted herself and others under

Faces in the Mist

her control just to peep into the gilded saloons of wickedness.

Bridge had taught her something of the gluttonous passion of the gambler. But now she saw it displayed with a naked fierceness that might have dismayed one of less nerve or more conscience. Here were the strained, bloodless faces, the burning eyes, the breasts panting in the excitement of chance, and the lust of gain that make the material for sudden tragedy. Curiosity deepened to fascination. It grew more and more absorbing to watch how Satan set his snares, and how the victims squirmed and sickened in the toils. The Casino in a word drew like a magnet. Of course all the best people went there, and wherever the best people were gathered together, there, surely, was Mrs. Fairhurst's place in the middle of the front row. But where she was merely theoretic, certain others were disastrously practical.

On the principle of doing in Rome as the Romans do, Benbreck took a hand, hazarding bravely and losing smartly. Not to be outdone, Carew, too, tried the blind goddess with similar results. He turned to his father for aid, and the interview was not to be reckoned among the pleasant incidents of his life.

With admirable candour Benbreck confessed to his friend he was "dead broke—absolutely on the rocks." "And I needn't talk of salvage," he added, with a half-comic ruefulness, "the pater simply wouldn't hear of it."

"And what do you propose to do?" Carew ventured to inquire, full of sympathy, though lacking the power to help.

"What can I do?" was the response. "Try the money-lenders again or shoot myself. The latter would be the quicker method, but it might give

Monte Carlo and Bankruptcy

bother. Which would be the better I'm sure I don't know. Monte Carlo's a terror, isn't it?"

Carew dutifully reported the conversation to his mother, who in turn, after some cogitation, confided the matter to his father. Mr. Fairhurst expressed no surprise.

"There'll be no shooting," he remarked, on hearing the tragic tale. "Don't you shed any tears in expectation of that. The other side is more serious. I had to pull Carew out of the mess; am I expected to do ditto to Benbreck?"

"There are others who will if you don't," Mrs. Fairhurst replied uneasily. "We've gone too far in this thing to turn back, Rube."

"Is a bankrupt lord such a prize, then, Susie?"

"A good many people would be glad enough to have Lord Benbreck to-morrow at his own figure."

"I guess there's no end of fools in this world," Mr. Fairhurst commented. "Are the would-be purchasers American?"

"Yes, American." She gave names in support of her statement. Mr. Fairhurst paused a moment to think.

"I'm forced to the conclusion," he said then, "that Americans coming to this side leave all their smartness and most of their sense behind them. There appears to be something in the climate of Europe that makes for brain slackness. Many of our American matrimonial speculations over here don't exactly turn out Bonanzas in the way of happiness, do they?"

"Some have been unlucky, certainly," Mrs. Fairhurst owned. "But Benbreck is a very good fellow," she added, stoutly.

"On the personal side good enough, perhaps," was the response. "Guess it's his education that's at fault. It's a new thing for me to be associated with a family that's done nothing in the whole course

Faces in the Mist

of its existence but spend money it never earned, and never thinks of earning when it wants more. That's a novel experience, and I'm trying to find out if I like it."

"You're not shying, Rube, are you?" his wife asked in alarm.

"Only taking stock, Susannah; just taking stock, that's all. Never like biting off more than I can chew if I can help it. I shouldn't care to take Benbreck over, and then be obliged to sour on him afterwards. That wouldn't be nice for anyone concerned. So I'm just trying to cipher out what kind of a bargain he'd be, more or less. Then, again, I don't know exactly what Pam thinks of him. Must talk the thing over with her."

But oddly enough, that suggestion threw Mrs. Fairhurst into a miniature panic.

"Better not," she returned quickly. "Pam hasn't been quite herself, lately. Don't talk to her just yet."

"I don't think Pam's a gambler," observed Mr. Fairhurst; "and I'm not at all sure whether she'd appreciate the gift of a husband who is. But we'll see, Susannah, we'll see. There's plenty of time. The thing needn't be rushed."

CHAPTER IV

THE SPHINX

NEEDN'T be rushed. Mrs. Fairhurst felt desperately that it ought to be rushed ; in fact, must be rushed and settled out of hand. Her reasons for this were none the less urgent that she durst not state them explicitly. With a swelling jealousy she thought of certain pushful compatriots.

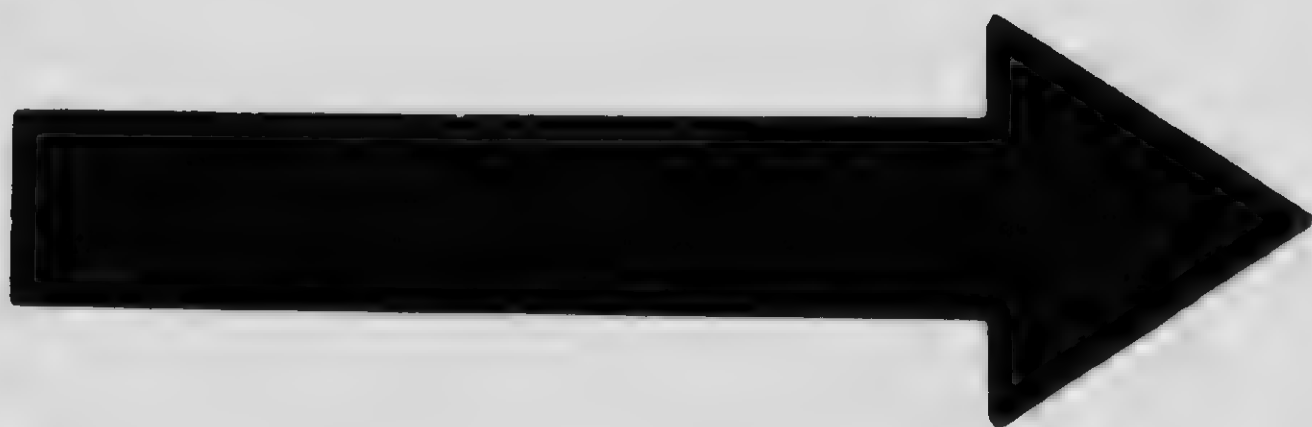
"If I don't take care they'll have him from among our very fingers," Mrs. Fairhurst reflected with a quivering sense of catastrophe. "And where will you be then, Susie Fairhurst, after all your big talk and spread-eagleism?"

To stand a discredited adventuress, a hunter of big game, foiled at the last moment by the lucky stroke of a rival, was a position too dreadful to contemplate.

Foreseeing the dangers with admirable sagacity, she set herself to provide for them. The contest might be bitter, for she would be fighting her own race and blood. It would be America at war with itself, wit against wit, gold against gold. What of that? Had she never fought before? She accepted the challenge as blithely as if the gauntlet were thrown to her in the open arena, and she picked it up assured of victory.

As a first move Lord Benbreck must at once be got out of the fire zone. That meant a solution of his present difficulties, which in turn meant other problems as prickly as a cactus hedge, as hard to smooth out as a rolled-up hedgehog.

Of a sudden Monte Carlo, anciently named *Portus*



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Faces in the Mist

Herculis Monæci, now more appropriately *Paradis du Diable*, ceased to charm. The blue sky; the bluer sea; the gay white embowered houses; the luxuriant foliage; the delicious climate, redolent surely of the balm and sunshine of Eden; the terraced gardens set against a background of splintered precipices, lost their fascination.

Even the enchantments of the Casino no longer enchanted. The awful intentness of the gamester hazarding his last chance; his abject despair when he lost; his gleaming excitement when he unexpectedly won; the glitter and shimmer of fashion—the dress, the jewels; the babbling, irresponsible gaiety of the world's smart set, freed from conventional restraints—all these, and the much more that goes with them became as nothing.

For more important things engrossed the mind of Mrs. Fairhurst, unexpected alterations in her plan of campaign, and the instant need of carrying them through. Moreover, she had to plan and execute without aid. To her regret Mr. Fairhurst was not so sympathetic as became a model husband; nor Benbreck perhaps so devoted as became an absorbed lover. Indeed, Mrs. Fairhurst's quick eye detected signs that he was not indisposed to give ear to the subtle wooings of other sirens.

This might be the fault of Pamela, whose conduct was often a cause of annoyance, sometimes of dismay, and always of wonder. Did she not realise her opportunities, had she forgotten her mother's teaching, lost the ambition to embellish herself with a title? It would be fatal to all the dreams of glory were Benbreck to get the impression that his birth, blood and position in the inner circle of the elect were not appreciated. Not only must he be taken at face value, but a thumping premium added. Upon that Mrs. Fairhurst was decided.

The Sphinx

She bore herself with impeccable fortitude and aplomb. Her spirits were excellent. She smiled on everybody, as her genial custom was, when she desired everybody's aid or submission. There is ineffable virtue in a smile. Of the right quality it subdues the rebellious, charms the refractory and cantankerous, dissolves opposition, overcomes rivalry. As an instrument of coaxing and wheedling it is unmatched. Logic falls before it ; man's fury meets it and is abashed, as turbulent waters are hushed by oil. It beams itself to victory. She who knows how to smile has learned how to conquer.

Mrs. Fairhurst first smiled Benbreck off the rocks, in spite of a seeming unwillingness on the part of her husband to pay ; next she smiled the entire company into compliance with her plans—a feat which just then was no lame testimonial to her genius. Then mountains of baggage began to rise as though heaved up by an earthquake. All self-respecting Americans travel with vast quantities of baggage. On a fair wager the Fairhursts carried more trunks, more boxes, more solid leather cases, more miscellaneous "truck" than any rivals on the highways of the globe. Their comings and goings were, indeed, as the comings and goings of an army, shaking the earth with impedimenta. But Mrs. Fairhurst was the best of transport officers as well as the ablest of generals in the field.

"Where will madame have all this sent?" the hotel manager asked, waiting to have the huge pile labelled.

"Egypt," was the prompt response. "Alexandria, for Cairo ; and will you please hurry up?"

To the land of the crocodile and the sphinx, then, the land of ancient mysteries and latter-day tourists, she carried her prize and her perplexities. On the edge of the desert she would tackle her problems finally and decisively, yea, with its furnace breath blistering

Faces in the Mist

her cheek (if need be) she would bring her desire to pass. So much she vowed in her heart, and it was not her custom to vow in vain.

To Egypt, therefore, she hastened on her grand campaign, her heart's core pulsating like a live dynamo, a lyric ecstasy bearing her soul aloft through realms of heaven. Was the hand of Destiny here?

It can only be answered that Mrs. Fairhurst would never consent to be a mere pawn in any game played by the so-called Fates. She cherished no mouldy superstitions. Had you mentioned it she would have laughed at the *Œdipus* tragedy. *Œdipus*, she would tell you, came to grief because he was a bungler, weak of intelligence, defective in education. She would have blamed the poets for making so much of him, in particular, for pushing him to the front and saying, "Behold the awfulness of Fate."

Fudge! Fate is simply the power to will and do, to be smart enough to get ahead of enemies and rivals. So America has discovered. *Œdipus* had no eyes; Mrs. Fairhurst's were the sharpest looking out of any human head upon a world waiting to be conquered and used, a fat oyster waiting to have its succulency enjoyed. Brave soul! Nevertheless, the question recurs, was the hand of Destiny here? Events which began to crowd will best furnish an answer.

On a sweltering afternoon at Gizeh she beheld in tourist-mood the impassive countenance which to multitudes of common people typifies inscrutable fate. Her nerves may have been a little overstrung. At any rate, as she gazed, a strange new emotion came upon her. She had looked upon the Great Sphinx before without being in the least aware of any quality of inscrutability. Now that dumb presence all at once became overwhelming. "You mime," it appeared to say disdainfully; "you pretender, you insect of a day, what do you here with your vain quests and

The Sphinx

ludicrous schemes? Go away; hide your nothingness."

In spite of the heat and her native courage a vague chill of uneasiness crept over her. Here was something at once awesomely human and awesomely unhuman, something that in its sublime aloofness made nought of wealth and power and even of time itself. Just so it had looked on the proudest of the earth, on Napoleon, for example, whose vaulting, world-wide ambitions were abashed before it. Napoleon was gone; Napoleon was dust. But the Great Sphinx remained serene in the midst of vicissitude, mutely propounding insoluble riddles. Mrs. Fairhurst turned abruptly to Pamela, who was by her side.

"Whatever made them fashion a thing like that?" she said, with a disapproving glance at the colossal figure above them. "What does it mean, anyway?"

"I don't know," Pamela replied. "I'm not sure that anybody knows."

Her own face was as grave and preoccupied as if she also had riddles of destiny to which she could get no answer. Turning half round to avoid her mother's eye, she looked away over the Nile to the outspread city of Cairo with its forest of gleaming domes and minarets. But she saw neither river nor town. She was gazing beyond both, out over the desert that stretched a glowing waste till it dipped into a molten horizon. One could almost imagine a hiss as the two met. Her expression was one of longing, as if she would fain see someone or something out there. A familiar voice lightly called her to attention.

"Studying the wilderness?" Benbreck remarked, pleasantly, coming up with Carew. He adjusted his monocle, raised his sun-helmet to shade his eyes, and looked out over the torrid leagues of sand. "By Jove, it is blistering, isn't it?" he said; "looks as if one would fairly sizzle out there." Then, bringing his

Faces in the Mist

eyes back to the wonder beside them, "Old Mother Sphinx stands the heat quite placidly, doesn't she? Those old Egyptians must have had some stray ideas in their heads to carve out such a creature. Needed some brains."

"Misdirected ingenuity, I call it," observed Mrs. Fairhurst, severely. "Have you any idea what the thing means?"

"Not the least," was the prompt answer. "Not the very least. Symbolical or allegorical or something of that sort, I suppose. Isn't there an ancient chestnut about the Sphinx sitting by the wayside asking questions of passers-by and conveniently devouring them because they could not answer? Heard it at Eton, you know. One of the masters there used to cram us with all kinds of antiquated stuff. A queer old chap, chuck full of antiquities; but a jolly good sort for all that. There was a tradition they got him out of the mummy room in the British Museum, galvanised him back to life, and made him rehearse all his ancient experiences."

"Do they teach things like *that* at Eton?" Mrs. Fairhurst asked, with some wonder and more contempt in her tone. "Thought Eton was one of the high-class, up-to-date English schools."

"Oh, so it is, so it is," Benbreck assured her, briskly. "Only you see on the classical side, as they call it, they've got to give that fusty stuff. Of course, you needn't pay any attention unless you like. I didn't much."

"Should think not," returned Mrs. Fairhurst, with all the emphasis of disdain.

"Forgot all about the Sphinx chestnut," pursued his lordship, "till I saw the thing this minute. What do you think of it, Miss Fairhurst? Rum-looking old concern, isn't it?"

"It's wonderful," Pamela replied, with astonishing

The Sphinx

fervour. "Perfectly wonderful. Looks as if it held the secrets of a universe. I wish it could speak."

"Daresay it could tell some rich old yarns," said Benbreck, tightening his monocle to have a better look at it, "Seen enough, at any rate."

"Say," struck in Carew, "the people who made it weren't exactly fools, anyway. No desert sand in their eyes when they hewed it out, and that's a fact. Hit the popular tradition to a T. Men couldn't make for themselves a better image of Fate. It's all there—secrecy, mystery, aloofness, indifference, everything. No leakage; nothing given away. Just lays low, and says nothing; and that's about what Fate does, I reckon."

"Come," said Mrs. Fairhurst, abruptly, turning away. "It's time we were getting back to our hotel. Besides, I see the motor waiting."

Too much of the creepy element of the unknown and mysterious was getting into the talk. If she didn't take care she, also, would be yielding to morbid obsession, and then anything fatuous might happen. For self-encouragement she repeated mentally that Fate was but the bogey of fatalists; that is to say, of weak, inept, and lazy people.

She made the return journey by the long Ismail road in unwonted silence, scarcely noticing the variegated crowds that salaamed, implored blessings and bucksheesh, scowled or gazed stolidly according to their need or humour. But on reaching the hotel, her radiance immediately returned. A letter lay on the table. Picking it up excitedly she tore open the envelope, read a card, as it were at a gulp, and then smiled. Here was the sort of Fate in which she believed—warm, vivid, pulsating with human interest, not of the absurd dead-stone order beyond the Blessed Nile, as the natives called their muddy river.

CHAPTER V

A FACE IN THE THRONG

To be explicit, his Highness the Khedive was giving an official reception at which all the dignitaries and grandees of Cairo and, indeed, of all Egypt, from the British Consul-General down, would be present. Her party, she was told, arrived just a day too late to be among the invited. But she thought otherwise, and lo ! here was the reward of her promptness and energy. Her success she generously attributed to the magic potency of a title.

"Doubt whether we could have managed it without Lord Beubreck," she remarked confidentially to Pamela.

"Was it worth while managing on such conditions, mother ?" Pamela asked.

"Good gracious, child," cried Mrs. Fairhurst, impatiently, "whatever's gone wrong with you lately ? Worth while managing ! Why, everybody who is anybody will be there. If I hadn't secured an invitation, we'd be left clicking our heels alone in the cold."

"Then I'm glad you managed it, mother," said Pamela, meekly.

Outwardly that reception was precisely like others of its kind, enormous, hot, gorgeous with an Oriental gorgeousness t'at filled the unaccustomed Western mind with wonder. Abdin, the Khedival Palace, stands appropriately in the region called Ismailia, that is to say, the Cairo West-end, hard by the beautiful Ezbekiya Square, with its hotels, theatres,

A Face in the Throng

telephones, pavements, green blinds, and other evidences of European occupation. For the genuine antique, the famous latticed windows, the splendid mosques, tombs and other legacies of Saracen art you must go eastward towards the Bab-en-Nasr (the Gate of Victory) and the Citadel. There you will find yourself among the old nazy, crooked streets, the bazaars, the greasy merchants, long innocent of a bath, squatting by their wares, the outcast dogs, the half-naked children, the magicians, fakirs, rank odours, and glammers of old time. From these the Abdin holds aloof with a kind of regal hauteur, as is proper to a palatial West-ender.

It was now the meeting-point of a great throng of divers tongues and complexions; and the buzz of English, French, Arabic, not to mention Hebrew and Hindustani, suggested an enlarged and aggravated Babel. The Khedive was host, but the chief personage present was the British Consul-General. A stolid, self-possessed, massive bit of English manhood, he bore himself with something of the great air of a lion in the midst of a rabble menagerie. Everybody ducked to him, watched for his smile, and was glad to be noticed by him. It is not to be supposed that everybody had an innate desire to reverence him. John Bull treads somewhat heavily, and is not always nice in avoiding corns. But such as were hurt by the Consul-General in the course of duty knew better than to cry out or retaliate. For British troops and gunboats bent on reprisals are nasty things to deal with.

To the glory and majesty of Britain as represented by his august person Mrs. Fairhurst paid her respects in overflowing measure. She did it openly, and with much volubility, talking to the great man as familiarly and loudly as she talked to her own President at the White House in Washington when she honoured him

Faces in the Mist

with a visit. And the great man smiled complacently, recognising the pretty American ways. It made no difference in his manner that he had afterwards to inquire who the lady was. With Benbreck he chatted as with an old friend, even to the extent of making would-be worshippers wait, and that pleased Mrs. Fairhurst most of all. Even in Cairo the Dundaloch title was an enchanted sesame that opened the inner doors of fashion. Could there be a better justification of her policy?

Pamela evinced a less individual and more general interest, and Benbreck showed his devotion by keeping pretty constantly in attendance. But in a swirl of the tide they got separated. She was gently edging her way on when all at once she stopped, staring as at an apparition. A face, a perfectly familiar face, a face she never expected to see there, was passing the other way within a few feet of her. In the shock of amazement she gazed, her heart still, her eyes fixed as though they had lost the power of winking. She had an impulse to call out, but it seemed her tongue was paralysed. The face moved on very slowly in the crush, eyes straight in front, till another swirl of the tide carried it out of sight. She was still gazing in a kind of stupefaction when Benbreck regained his place by her side.

"You have seen him?" he remarked, instantly noting her dumbfounded expression.

She turned to him as if not comprehending. Then suddenly, as the blaze of lighted straw, the colour flamed in her face. He took it as signifying anger and resentment at the man's insolent intrusion; to Benbreck's mind, a very natural and proper feeling.

"You mean Mr. Chisholm," she said, with a mighty effort to be composed.

"Yes," was the reply; "I mean Mr. Kenneth Chisholm. Caught a glimpse of him as he was walking

A Face in the Throng

off through the crowd. Had no idea the fellow was anywhere within the Egyptian border. Wonder how he contrived to get in here?"

"There are all sorts of people here," Pamela observed quietly. Her heart was beating wildly, she was giddy with excitement. Nevertheless she smiled as she spoke.

"True, it's a pretty mixed lot," Benbreck owned; "but they don't, after all, admit anybody and everybody. Did he see you?"

"No, I don't think he did," she answered. "In fact, I'm sure he didn't."

"Then I only hope he'll have the luck to clear out before we set eyes on him again," said Benbreck, significantly.

"Why?" Pamela asked, tightly bridling her resentment.

"Oh, mostly for the sake of his own health," was the response. "And also for our own convenience. We don't want any bother. One can't always prevent vipers from crossing one's path; but one doesn't want to have the trouble of killing them. One word in the right quarter would soon sweep him out of the way."

Pamela looked hard at him as if to read what lay behind this speech. There was on his face some vestige of the sneering smile he always affected towards inferiors who had provoked his ill-will, but behind the smile she could spy malice and vindictiveness lurking like serpents in the dark.

"You wouldn't do that," she said.

"Lies with himself whether I would or not. If he clears out, then——"

"I think he has cleared out," put in Pamela.

In the same moment she saw her mother coming up, and hastened to meet her, Benbreck again following.

Faces in the Mist

"Isn't it time to go, mother?" she asked. "It's stifling here, and I have got a headache."

"I'll try to find your father," returned Mrs. Fairhurst. "But what has given you a headache?" She had none.

"The heat, I suppose, and the crush," was the response.

"We have just made the interesting discovery, Mrs. Fairhurst," observed Benbreck, "that among the guests of the evening is one we scarcely expected to see here—I mean Mr. Kenneth Chisholm." He laughed as he spoke, one of his little dry, derisive laughs.

Pamela glanced at him quickly, and then as quickly turned away, her eyes flashing, the blood of a sudden burning on cheek and brow.

CHAPTER VI

FURTHER DISCOVERIES

IN spite of Mrs. Fairhurst's fine disdain, or, perhaps, because of it, Fate was at her old tricks. At an official reception of the Khedive, Kenneth Chisholm walks forth through the glittering throng, and lo! the invisible looms are busily at work.

Mrs. Fairhurst suspected nothing of their weaving. She was a little surprised to hear of Mr. Chisholm's presence in Cairo, wondered how he escaped her vigilant eye, and admitted that life includes some striking and unexpected coincidences. For the rest his comings and goings could not possibly affect the result of the game she was playing. In other words it would be ridiculous to think the Fates (supposing them to exist) could dare to spin for her without her knowledge or consent. It will be seen she carried away no lesson from the immemorial face at Gizeh.

Never thinking of unseen powers she went her energetic way, her immediate object being the conquest of Cairo. As usual, she succeeded to the utmost. Her party was received in private audience by the Khedive, dined with the Consul-General, appeared in the seat of honour at the Opera. Thereupon, all the golden-hinged doors at Cairo flew open. "Enter," they seemed to say. "Enter, O conqueror, that we may be glorified." And she entered radiant and confident, as a conqueror should.

In all this Pamela took her part obediently, if with

Faces in the Mist

little zest. She had often an air of abstraction, was preoccupied, absent-minded. In truth, a new vision haunted her. The old vision was of a face on a rural platform in the far-off Scottish Highlands, hastening heedlessly to a railway train. The face remained, but it was shifted to another frame. The setting was now an official reception in Cairo. She would always see it going forth with the straight, purposeful look, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left. Why had it disappeared so suddenly, and whither had it gone? To both questions she was to have a speedy and astonishing answer.

It chanced one day that the Fairhurst party fled from the fine dust and hot wind of the streets to the cool, green seclusion of the gardens attached to the residence of the Consul-General. The great man having some necessary business to transact, deputed civilities to his private secretary, a young Englishman of the best type, who carried the culture of Eton and Oxford to Egypt. Common reminiscences and associations drew Benbreck and himself together. Seeing this, Mrs. Fairhurst gave them their liberty.

"You young people talk," she said; "my daughter will bear you company, if you don't mind; and we," indicating her husband and herself, "will look after ourselves." Carew happened to be elsewhere attending to interests of his own.

The trio thus set free, wandered off into an arbour of palms and sat down, talking of this and that home or local subject, this and that visitor to Egypt. In the midst of the talk Pamela asked, with an admirably casual air, "By the way, do you know anything of a Mr. Chisholm? He made a flitting appearance at the Khedive's reception."

The private secretary looked at her cautiously.

"Do you know him?" he asked in return. Private secretaries to men of State must be many things not

Further Discoveries

demanding of ordinary people ; but first and last they must be paragons of discretion.

"I have met him," was the answer. "And I knew something of his mother and sister in Scotland."

Lord Benbreck pulled at his cigarette in a sudden spasm of energy, but, as if recognising the unfitness of the action, immediately relapsed into listlessness and indifference. The private secretary instinctively glanced round. Orientals have sharp ears and a marvellous gift of constructing plots from stray words and hints. Hence the white man must beware how he speaks even in secret.

"Then, Miss Fairhurst, you know a very lucky man," was the emphatic response. Pamela smiled, admirably dissembling the painful keenness of her interest and the embarrassing beat of her pulses.

"How is he so very fortunate?" she asked carelessly.

"You know what he is?"

"Some sort of an engineer, isn't he?"

"Some sort of an engineer," chuckled the private secretary. "A good many men I know would give their dearest possession to be the particular sort of engineer he is, occupying the particular sort of position he occupies."

Benbreck condescended to mark how Pamela took this information. She arched her eyebrows a hair's-breadth in the most approved manner, and he was satisfied.

"An adventurer," he put in on his own account. "Shouldn't imagine he's the least likely to set the Nile on fire."

"Then you too know him?" said the secretary.

"A little, a very little," Benbreck replied, as though regretting a fact he could not deny. "Not exactly friends, you know; but we've met." He looked at

Faces in the Mist

Pamela as though to say, "You know when, where, and how."

"Chisholm Bey is a good fellow," observed the private secretary, "and immensely popular."

"Chisholm Bey," Pamela cried in surprise. "Why, that sounds as if he were really a big man out here. What does it mean exactly?"

"The most excellent good luck," returned the private secretary blandly. "Mind you, I don't say he doesn't deserve all he's got. He does, and the more that's to come, which is not likely to be insignificant, if I know anything of signs and omens."

"But what is he?" Pamela persisted, no longer able to restrain her interest, even under Benbreck's rebuking eye. "What has he done to get the title of Chisholm Bey?"

"Well," the private secretary replied slowly, "you have heard of the Hedjaz Railway, which our venerated ally, the Sublime Porte, is making from Damascus to Medina and Mecca for the benefit of the faithful of Islam. He's one of the chief engineers. Science, you know, has no religion. When the Musulman wants a bit of stiff engineering done he's got sense enough to go outside the faith. A German is engineer-in-chief; but the Scot, as usual, is well up. If a man wants to do anything in particular in the world nowadays, the first essential is to be born either in Germany or Scotland, for a Briton Scotland by preference. Chisholm Bey is climbing the ladder hand over fist."

"Risen to be foreman of a gang of niggers, eh?" Benbreck observed with fine irony.

"That and a little more," laughed the private secretary. "He has indeed made a name for handling men, though, of course, he's there because of his skill and reputation as an engineer. And also," he added, lowering his voice, "because it's convenient to have a cool-headed, clear-sighted Briton keeping an eye on

Further Discoveries

the outskirts of empire. He's just been over to see the Chief—my Chief, I mean; a little holiday excursion, you understand. Nobody can possibly be surprised when Chisholm Bey visits his illustrious countryman in Cairo." The secretary smiled diplomatically.

"Then he's really a man of importance," said Pamela, thrilling through and through.

"Judge for yourself," returned the secretary.

"The other day the Chief gave him a full hour alone while great dignitaries were kicking their heels in the ante-room, and I was mentally sweating to keep them amused and in good humour."

"And does that mean anything in particular?" Pamela inquired with delightful innocence.

"Ask such as would have favours," was the response; "such as would mount the giddy stairs of preferment, such as might possibly be mentioned in confidential reports if need arose."

"Is his faith no bar to this dazzling success?" Benbreck asked; "or does he conveniently forget his religion?"

"Such matters are not in my department," smiled the secretary. "But it's rumoured they're enticing him to take the leap and embrace Islam."

"And that would mean?" said Pamela, holding her breath.

"Pretty much anything he liked in the long run, I fancy," was the reply. "And in the meantime he could solace himself with as many wives as he cared to have or his purse could afford."

"O—oh!" said Pamela, doubtfully. Kenneth Chisholm with a multitude of tawny wives was not a picture she cared to contemplate.

"Should be sorry for the wives," remarked Benbreck. "They, poor things, would not be in much of a paradise with such a master."

Faces in the Mist

"Dare say some would joyously enough make the venture," said the secretary. "Moslem maidens, I understand, are seldom coy in such transactions. Chisholm Bey could easily fill a harem."

Benbreck flicked the ash from his cigarette, and rose abruptly to signify his disapproval of the talk. The possible, probable or contingent love affairs of Mr. Kenneth Chisholm did not interest him in the least. Neither had he come to Egypt to hear praises of that arrant pretender. He was surprised at the private secretary's enthusiasm, and secretly nettled by Pamela's too evident interest. What could Kenneth Chisholm or his affairs be to her?

At his lordship's hint the group resumed their walk; but Pamela had yet another question to ask before the subject nearest her heart was dismissed.

"Do you know if Mr. Chisholm is still in Cairo?" she asked the secretary.

"Should think he's half-way to Acre or Beyrout by this time," was the answer. "Wasn't quite sure at which port he'd land. Depended on letters which were to reach him at Alexandria whether he'd go on to Damascus or join the line down by Ma'an. His work has lain in tunnelling the red sandstone hills and bridging the gulleys about Tebuk and Darel Hamra, a frightfully difficult bit of engineering, I'm told. There, Germany and Scotland have shown what modern engineers can do. Nearer Medina the engineer is a Musulman, because it is desired to keep the Holy City holy. The railway will alter all that. There's to be a grand opening before long, and Chisholm is wanted."

"I suppose that was why he ran away from the reception."

"Yes. He was there only by way of duty. That done he bolted."

Pamela thanked him with her eyes; then they swept over the cool luxuriance of the gardens.

Further Discoveries

"How lovely!" she exclaimed in sudden enthusiasm.
"How perfectly lovely!"

"Good enough for Cairo," admitted the private secretary; "but for real gardens you must go to Damascus. You're going there, aren't you?"

"I believe it's provisionally on the programme," Pamela answered.

"They're a bit conceited about their gardens over there," remarked the private secretary. "They imagine there's only one beauty spot on the face of the whole globe, and that they've got it. But it is beautiful, extraordinarily beautiful as an oasis in the desert."

"You've been there?" said Pamela.

"For a little while. Worth seeing. Might run across Chisholm Bey there."

Benbreck strode on impatiently, and the others could not but follow. Presently they found the Consul-General talking world politics with Mr. Fairhurst, and receiving enlightenment concerning American ambitions and institutions. Mrs. Fairhurst stood by to see her husband said nothing to offend the *amour propre* of the Nabob, who represented Britain. At sight of Pamela her father broke off: "Say, Pam, just been hearing of your friend Chisholm—Chisholm Bey they call him now. He's mounting, I tell you. Always thought he had grit. Can do more than walk over the Cairn Dhu Craggs and live. And he's been in Cairo here. Just missed him. Did you know?"

"Yes," answered Pamela, quietly, "I knew."
"And never thought of telling us," said her father reproachfully. "Should have liked to see him; but may catch up on him on our way round. From all I hear he'd be a mighty useful friend to have."

Mrs. Fairhurst, watching the face of Benbreck as intently as a devotee watches the face of a saint, was horrified to see him scowl. But the next instant

Faces in the Mist

he was as urbane and placid as ever. She must have been mistaken, or he may have had a twinge of toothache. Meanwhile, Pamela's heart beat deliriously.

"Damascus," it chanted lyrically. "Damascus, Ma'an, the Hedjaz Railway, mystery, adventure, and Kenneth for guide."

Was her opportunity to make amends coming after all? It was not Chisholm Bey she thought of, not the celebrated engineer honoured by a foreign power; but simply Kenneth—the Kenneth that looked at her out of the mists above the Cairn Dhu Crag. There was a mist in her eyes now as she thought of the past, and thrilled over the possibilities of the future.

CHAPTER VII

BENBRECK'S OPPORTUNITY

Of a sudden the conviction was forced upon Benbreck that the time had come to act and act decisively. Pamela was evincing a strange, indeed a fatuous and most improper interest in Kenneth Chisholm. That was too absurd to be tolerated. Besides, letters were coming thick and fast from England, written by solicitors and their greedy kin, full of bills, demands, threats and general insolence. At first my lord could not make out how his creditors found his track. Then in a flash he understood. The vanity of Mrs. Fairhurst! There was the explanation. It blazed the trail, that is to say, through the medium of the press, announced to Europe, Africa and America how she progressed and conquered. It was vexing, but facts must be accepted. His creditors were on the trail, and, like good sportsmen, were certainly making the chase hot.

Moreover, as cope-stone to his vexations, one day he received a note in the scrawly, eccentric hand of his father.

"The pack of wolves, no longer content with baying, are showing a disposition to bite," Dundaloch wrote. "Judging by their ferocity, they seem most infernally hungry, and will give trouble if a sop is not thrown to them. How goes your little venture? As a matter of policy I advise you to bring things to a head. Money can't be got too soon. Only no settlement without my consent. The terms must be as stiff

Faces in the Mist

as we can make them. The wretched state of my own exchequer does not at this juncture permit me to offer you any financial aid. Rents are falling, taxes increasing, robbery of all sorts going on as if our law-makers were mere bandits, which, I grant you, they are for most part. Jack is to have pudding thrice a day seven days in the week, and his master, for the good of his soul, Lenten fare all the year round. Pretty state of affairs in a civilised country. Besides all this, I have three pleas running, with knavish lawyers making the worst of them. Confound the whole hotch-potch! Socialism, anarchy, general rascality, that's becoming the order of the day. Honesty is simply thrust out of court. What a man used to think his own turns out to be somebody else's. But for the House of Lords we should all have to take to gambling or pawnbroking. Need I point the moral? Make the most of yourself. Get money—as much of it as you can decently lay hands on. Since the ancient nobility must put up their titles for sale, don't let yours go cheaply. I repeat, let the terms be stiff."

"That's definite enough, anyhow," Benbreck reflected. In the solitude of his own room he lighted a cigarette of the best Egyptian tobacco to think it all over. The idea of going to Mr. Fairhurst with the double plea of love and finance was not alluring. However, what must be, must be.

"Suppose I'd better buck up and get it over," Benbreck told himself, with a dig of the spur. "The longer the worse."

It was pleasant to drift along gloriously without thought of the morrow; but the morrow most illogically was casting its shadow before. He must act; that was plain.

An assiduous fortune lay await with fit opportunity. It is the proper thing for all first-class visitors to view Cairo by moonlight from the altitude of a flat roof.

Benbreck's Opportunity

As Mrs. Fairhurst always did the proper thing, regardless of cost a whole roof, the best procurable, was engaged, or rather a roof and a tower, near the gigantic Mosque of Sultan Hasan, a notable landmark to all the city. Mr. and Mrs. Fairhurst, with Carew, and two casual guests from the hotel, occupied the roof. At the invitation of Benbreck, Pamela mounted to the tower, whereupon Mrs. Fairhurst threw her husband a glance of intelligence. "Things are progressing, you see," it intimated. "Leave them alone."

Pamela limbed with evident eagerness. It was remarked, in fact, that within the last few days she had recovered her old spring and gaiety, her old zest for adventure. "Like herself again," Mrs. Fairhurst commented, privately. "Can't make out what can have been wrong with her." She had, in truth, leaped from listlessness to an almost feverish animation, as though she could not bear to be idle or still. Those who watched were glad without guessing the reason; and it was not Pamela's cue to enlighten them just yet.

Benbreck took her blithe readiness as the natural response to his own advances. Of course she was glad. Why shouldn't she be? He meant to do her a signal honour, which she had intelligence and gratitude enough to appreciate. He understood it all, the cute man. Had you questioned Pamela she would have answered with a laugh that betrayed no secrets.

Benbreck's heart beat at least ten to the minute faster than the normal as he mounted the narrow stairs, and ten more as he took his place beside her on the little platform that was scarcely big enough for two unless they chose to stand pretty close together. A lover's eyrie in good truth, excellently fit for the business in hand. Benbreck was lucky, as usual.

On stepping upon the platform Pamela cried out

Faces in the Mist

in a passion of delight at the enchanted view spread out before her.

"Fairyland, fairyland at last!" she exclaimed. "Yet I seem to have seen it all before in dreams. Is it real?"

The city, magically illumined by the full moon, appeared, indeed, a thing of dreams, a creation of the imagination that might melt and vanish at a touch. "Quite real, I assure you," Benbreck answered, affecting amusement.

"Looks as if some wizard by a wave of his magic wand brought up an enchanted scene from 'The Arabian Nights,'" Pamela went on in ecstasy. "It's glorious, glorious. I shall always think of it as the most wonderful moonlight effect I ever saw."

With a feeling of intoxication she leaned over the parapet, drawing in a deep breath of the delicious desert air, which at that height and hour exhilarated like some ineffable wine.

"Look! look!" she cried, in fresh glee, "the very desert is enchanted! By day it's just a great yellow, scorched, desolate, ugly waste, radiating heat and dust. Look at it now. It's transfigured, everything's transfigured, earth and heaven."

She turned her enraptured face skyward. A few great stars and constellations burned brilliantly, as if declining to be snuffed out by the regnant moon—Orion, with his satellites, Arcturus and Jupiter, Sirius, flashing like a vast diamond near at hand, and higher up to the left, westward towards America, Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, a wonderland of pulsating planets. Then once more she leaned over the parapet, and looked forth on the city. The desert air, passing pure and free over the house-tops, fondled her face and filled her lungs. Her eyes feasting on the miracle of transfiguration dilated as in adoration.

"It's true," she said, as if communing with herself.

Benbreck's Opportunity

"What's true?" Benbreck asked, by no means approving of her mood.

"That on the great scale Nature is still the unrivalled artist," she answered, never moving her eyes. "Were it not impertinent I could find it in my heart to salute her. Now one begins to understand the poets. Do you know any Arab poetry?"

"Not a word," answered Benbreck, half resentfully. "Never read a line of the stuff in my life." He was growing impatient, and wished as much to be understood.

"I'm sorry," said Pamela, still gazing in rapture, "because this is the very place and time to hear some of it recited. Doesn't all this make you think of:

The diamond turrets of Shadukiam
And the fragrant bowers of Amberabad?

"No; can't say it does," was the reply. "In fact I never heard of them till this moment."

It was necessary to be practical. He had not come there to recite poetry nor to admire moonlight effects.

He drew a shade closer. A quiver ran through his frame. The great moment had come. Screwing his monocle, he coughed slightly; not that he was embarrassed, but it was prudent to give some signal of action. He wanted to be quite in order, to be certain he ran no risk of making an ass of himself. Even in Cairo and the stress of love-making, the dignity, the serene ease and magnificent self-possession of the British peerage must be maintained.

Pamela was leaning with both elbows on the parapet, her chin in the hollow of her united palms, engrossed in admiration. She made an engaging picture. A connoisseur in feminine qualities, and fully conscious of the horror he was about to bestow, he felt it necessary to assure himself afresh of her beauty. And she was beautiful, fascinatingly beautiful, as

Faces in the Mist

she stood there gazing forth upon the desert. If she thought too much of the scene and too little of her privileges, he could forgive her. She was beautiful. He could present her to his friends with pride, he could hold her with satisfaction as a private possession. With that assurance in his heart he bent forward to speak the mystic word softly in her ear. But before his tongue could frame it, she started back in fright. A shrill, weird sound like the wild laughter of a maniac broke the stillness.

"Whatever's that?" she gasped. She was almost in his arms, but recovered herself instantly, and stood with remarkable straightness on her own two feet.

"Hyæna, I think," explained Benbreck, cursing the thing for its untimely interruption. "They hide in all sorts of holes during the day, and come out at night, you know. In conjunction with stray dogs they used to be the chief scavengers of Cairo, and are still useful, I understand, on the outskirts."

The example of the hyæna set other nocturnal prowlers off on their own account. Far away a wild dog howled dismally. More dismally yet owls screeched among the tombs close at hand.

"It grows eerie up here," Pamela said, a shiver in her voice. "Let us go down." Benbreck gallantly put the spur to his courage.

"Before we go may I tell you something, Miss Fairhurst?" he asked, a thrill of passion in his voice. "Something—very—important."

He was playing the headlong lover in spite of himself. She looked at him quickly. The moon shone full on his face, revealing an expression of unusual earnestness. As she did not immediately speak, he added:

"You have just been in rapture over the scene. Won't you stay up here a little while longer?" But as if some malevolent sprite planned it, hyæna, wild



"'WHATEVER'S THAT,' SHE GASPED."

Benbreck's Opportunity

dog, and owl raised their voices in chorus even while he spoke.

"These dreadful things make me cold all through," she replied. "And see, how the moonlight gleams on the white tomb-stones. I hadn't noticed them. We'll be seeing ghosts if we stay here any longer."

"Ghosts won't annoy us, and—and I really want to tell you something before you go," said Benbreck, desperately. "Quite romantic up here, isn't it?" he added, with valiant cheerfulness.

"Those horrid beasts spoil everything," Pamela responded, not yet over her fright. "Listen, they make my flesh creep."

"Just a word, then, before you go—one word," Benbreck pleaded.

"To-morrow," she answered. "To-morrow you will tell me—everything."

"But to-morrow we start for Damascus," he reminded her.

"Does that matter? Travelling needn't keep us from talking. In fact it's nice while travelling to have something to talk about besides the weather and the scenery. Ship-board is a splendid place for talking. We can lean over the taff-rail and watch the phosphorous flashing like—like a streak of quicksilver in the wake of the ship. There will be no hyænas or wild dogs or owls or things to disturb us. There, they're at it again. Hideous! Come."

With a quick, agitated movement she turned to go. He had an impulse to spring forward, clasp her in his arms, pour out his impassioned tale, and get the thing over. To be sure it would be rather melodramatic, rather bucolic, perhaps; but then, even a lord must be human at times. "Think what we could do with a million or so." His father's words flashed upon him. Here was the million, almost in his grasp. Was it going to slip away? With a dizzy impulse

Faces in the Mist

to commit himself and all the Dundalloch dignities, honours and hereditaments, he stepped forward. But in the same moment she took the first step down the narrow stairs.

"Come," she said, smiling back at him. "Come."

"You're deucedly unkind," he returned, in a hurt tone. Nevertheless, as she was proceeding downward he followed, displeased, a little crestfallen, and a good deal piqued.

Mrs. Fairhurst, running to them when they descended, noted that Benbreck was flushed, and Pamela visibly excited. From which facts the shrewd woman instantly drew her own conclusions. At last, at last. She glanced towards her husband to give him the signal of intelligence, but failed to catch his eye. He was deep in an absurd conversation concerning mosques and tombs and kings long since turned to dust to the neglect of the living, palpitating interests around him. He would hear of his folly later.

Pamela, scarcely halting in her step, made to pass on.

"Aren't you going to stay here awhile, Pam?" her mother asked.

"Got some packing to do yet," was the answer.

"My maid can't do everything. Must go and help."

Benbreck had, naturally, to conduct her to the hotel.

Mrs. Fairhurst, watching from above, saw them appear in the street below, and go off swiftly, Pamela leading by half a pace. That meant that they were as yet a little embarrassed by their new-found happiness.

"Natural, quite natural," reflected Mrs. Fairhurst, serenely. That was the way of lovers, awkward, overcome with felicity. She recalled her own far-off experiences.

"A wonderful thing to be in love," she told herself. It was wonderful even with common people. But what must it be to have won the love of a real live lord? Happy, lucky Pamela.

CHAPTER VIII

A PROPOSAL

FEELING he must not dawdle, Benbreck assiduously manœuvred for the promised talk over the taff-rail on the way to Damascus. The task was delicate, for Pamela had fallen into a teasing mood, now frivolously gay, now ironically grave, and again full of alien and tantalising interests. There were moments when it actually seemed as if she were trying to put him off, but he was not to be denied.

At last, by a masterly piece of strategy, he got her alone one night at the ship's stern, and the two looked over it into the phosphorescent waters, according to compact. The occasion could scarcely have been more propitious. A tropical night cast its spell on everything. The soft, violet sky was inlaid with clusters of slyly winking stars; the placid sea, alive in its quiet depths with darting fire and flashing silver, lay like a gleaming mirror of ebony; the air had the cool balm of scarcely moving winds. A lover's night, in fact, and Benbreck felt strangely exalted.

Looking ardently at his companion he told himself yet again that she united in herself more charms and graces than any other girl he could name. She was young, rich, handsome, accomplished; in all, save blood, an ideal countess. And what of blood? In these days, as his father pertinently remarked, the peerage does not thrive by blood alone. He was conscious of a rare air transfusing his being as he stood beside her pretending to gaze at the glittering track

Faces in the Mist

of the steamer. The cynic in him was drugged or soothed to sleep. There was something divine, something ecstatic in love after all. Yes, it was a good thing to be in love with such a girl. Pamela, still in the tantalising humour, showed a disposition to rhapsodise over the glories of the night, but he adroitly brought her back.

"Your promise," he reminded her softly. "Your promise. May I tell you my secret now, though indeed it can't be any secret to you? You must have seen it long ago."

She was gazing down very hard, as if absorbed in watching the white foam flung from the propeller. But, in truth, though her eyes were on it, she did not see the white foam at all. Instead she saw a face at first dim and misty, and then magically clear, the grave, steadfast eyes regarding her intently. That picture slid past and the eyes were averted; the face all at once became grim; it was set straight forward, passing near her without look or sign of recognition.

"May I tell you?" Benbreck repeated, an odd vibration in his voice. She turned with a half-suppressed gasp, like one taken unawares.

"What?" she asked.

"That I love you," was the passionate response.

"You know it, you must know it."

A new expression came into her face; she lifted her eyes in demure astonishment.

"Oh! Lord Benbreck, are you sure?" she said.

"That you know?" he asked in turn.

"I'm stupid, not that," she said with a little catch of the breath. "It is a very serious thing for a man in your station to love."

That was a proposition he would not attempt to deny. He had never disguised the seriousness of it, even from himself.

A Proposal

"And," she added, in a low but clear voice, "and it is a very serious thing for a girl to be loved by such as you."

"I'm quite sure of myself, it that's what you mean," he asseverated fervidly. "I couldn't possibly be surer of anything. Upon my honour and conscience I couldn't."

"Honour and conscience are sacred things, aren't they?" she murmured.

In the dim light he could just see the glow on her cheek, and make out that her bosom fluttered delectably. The divine emotion was, in fact, upon her.

"Nothing more sacred," he agreed with alacrity. "If I had anything more sacred to swear by I would do it; I would, and that's honest."

"It's not necessary to swear by anything, is it?" she returned, describing a fantastic figure on the deck with her toe.

"That's good of you, Miss Fairhurst," he cried, thrilling in a way that surprised himself. "That's jolly good of you. Some girls want all manner of vows; they want a man to ——"

"Oh! then you know from experience," she put in, looking up as in wonder.

"No, not from experience," he replied, slightly embarrassed by her deduction. "Fellows talk of that sort of thing you know, and it gets on the stage, and one reads it in books, novels, and that sort of stuff."

"Then it's not first-hand knowledge?"

"Not at all, I assure you, nothing of the kind. I never made vows, never believed in them till—till now. I love no one but you, no one."

"That is a great compliment, Lord Benbreck," Pamela responded gravely.

"Oh, I assure you it's true; I'm not putting it

Faces in the Mist

on. The fact is I can't help myself." And, indeed, the mere exercise of love-making evoked a heady rapture that affected him like wine. So men swear falsely or, at any rate, mistakenly; but Benbreck was certain he meant all he said.

"That is a yet greater compliment," said Pamela, with the same surprising gravity.

"Don't call it a compliment," he pleaded. "I—I don't look at it like that. When a fellow loves a girl head over heels, why, dash it all! you know, he doesn't think of it as a compliment."

"But it is all the same," persisted Pamela. "A man can offer a woman nothing better than his love. By doing that he glorifies her. But when he can't help offering it, why, you see, it becomes a kind of consecration. She is put in the round tower of his heart, to be held there sacred for ever and ever."

"If you like to put it that way," he acquiesced.

He dropped his monocle, caught it up and screwed it back into its place, not because it had not been properly fixed, but only as a means of clearing his thoughts. He had not expected to be called on to proceed in this manner, to beseech, declare, prove, convince, and was the least little bit put out. He had always fancied it would be enough to say in effect: "It is my pleasure to do you this honour. Come." But lo! the lady hesitated, was coy. However, he rose intrepidly to the occasion. If it was affirmation she wanted, he would not stint his passion.

"And since what you say expresses my sentiments exactly," he proceeded, "may I hope for any return, any reciprocal—I'm a deucedly bad orator, Miss Fairhurst, but you know what I mean. I offer you the round tower of my heart. Will you occupy it? And I offer you something besides, something to go along with it, you know. My family is——"

A Proposal

"Great and famous," said Pamela, looking at him with almost disconcerting straightness.

"Not the least of the families of Great Britain, anyway," Benbreck owned with justifiable pride.

"That's just it," said Pamela, as if the very greatness of the Dundallochs were a bar. "The woman who enters it must be very, very worthy. A mistake would be too dreadful to think of."

"With you there would be no possibility of mistake," he returned, gallantly. "You are worthy in every way."

"Ah! you say that now. Would you say it twenty years hence?"

"Twenty? Yes, a hundred, if I lived so long. I should bless the day you—you—took possession of the round tower you speak of." She was silent and he added: "Of course I can appreciate your hesitation, and I honour you the more for it." He felt that any other girl of Pamela's position would have jumped at the chance, and her modesty was, on the whole, a pleasing feature of character. "I can understand, too," he pursued, "that a girl doesn't like to confess too much all at once. If you would only say that you like me just a little bit, you know."

"I could not do that, Lord Benbreck."

"Why?" The question was jerked out with something of the astonishment of sheer fright.

"Because I like you very much."

She spoke quite calmly and steadily. If Benbreck had been on his guard, if his wits had not been flying through realms of their own creation, the very calmness and frankness of tone might have served him as a danger signal. But he was blinded by his own fervour, carried away by the double delight of love and riches. Had anyone told him a few months before that the word of a woman would intoxicate him thus he would have laughed in scorn. Yet here he was carried off his

Faces in the Mist

feet by the simplest of simple admissions. Now he could tell his father that the yelping dogs would have a bone to silence them, that at last he saw the gleam of golden ways leading out of the thick wood.

"You like me," he said, as greedy as the commonest lover to hear the confession again. "Really and truly?"

"Very much."

The words were again uttered with perfect clearness and calmness. But Benbreck's head was spinning with delight; his pulses were dancing deliriously. In an ecstasy of joy he seized Pamela's hand and kissed it.

"You make me happy," he said, as though panting out his soul in one long heaved spasm of bliss. "You make me happy, happier than I can tell." He edged closer, but to his astonishment Pamela edged gently away.

"But you consented," he said, protesting in the accents of the accepted lover.

"Lord Benbreck," she replied, with a quiet but steadfast look. "You and I are not free agents."

"Why not?" he demanded in dismay.

"Because we have both our fathers to think of, and you your family honours and title in addition. They are not to be disposed of lightly."

"Oh, that's all right," he returned, much relieved. "You are worthy of every honour, and the pater's all right. I'll guarantee his consent. As to your father, why I will go to him at once, this minute, if I've your permission."

"It will be necessary in any case," she said, a meaning in her words that he failed to detect.

"Here goes then," he said, like a hunter taking a difficult ditch. "By to-morrow morning it'll be all settled, and then——"

The thought was too delicious to be put into words.

A Proposal

Pamela smiled at him, and he went his way breathing the rare air of the lover's paradise.

She watched him till he was out of sight. Then, turning, she leaned once more over the taff-rail and looked into the white foam flung from the propeller. And once again the mystic face gazed up at her.

CHAPTER IX

MR. FAIRHURST'S NEW DEAL

MR. FAIRHURST was in the saloon writing letters. As Benbreck entered he looked up, and noting his lordship's peculiar ecstatic expression, was not surprised to be asked for a word in private. Instantly he gathered up his papers and rose.

"Better be quite alone, hadn't we?" he remarked. "Come right along here, if you don't mind," and led the way to his cabin. "Have a cigar?" he said, genially, holding out his case when Benbreck was seated. Then, taking one himself, he lighted it, sat down, and looked at his visitor as if to say, "I'm waiting; fire away." Though expanding easily in social intercourse, in business matters he was a man of few words. Often he accepted or rejected a big proposal with a single monosyllable, and would never, if he could help it, use two words where one would suffice. To Benbreck he appeared phenomenally strong, keen and alert as he sat there, cool and at ease, all his wits in the right place and handy for use.

In obedience to the silent invitation to proceed Benbreck cleared his throat with a slight cough that was not without suggestion of embarrassment.

"Perhaps you have noticed, sir," he began, coming with admirable promptitude to the point, "that Miss Fairhurst and myself are—well, very good friends." He smiled, and Mr. Fairhurst nodded affably. "And—and I've come to speak to you on the subject, sir,

Mr. Fairhurst's New Deal

if you don't mind. That is, if you're sure it's perfectly convenient to you just now."

"Perfectly convenient," Mr. Fairhurst answered.

"A thing of this sort doesn't turn up every day, and even if there were other things, they'd have to be side-tracked, as we say in my country. Is there any understanding between my daughter and yourself, any kind of preliminary agreement, so to speak?"

"We've talked together, of course," Benbreck replied, "and she's been good enough to own that she likes me." Benbreck was not given to blushing, but in making this statement he blushed like a school-girl.

"So!" said Mr. Fairhurst, "and you kind of feel that you like her?"

"I feel a great deal more than that, sir; I feel that I love her," Benbreck declared emphatically.

"In fact, I'm absolutely certain of it."

"That's a basis to go on," said Mr. Fairhurst, smiling. "You think it's the kind of love that will wear? Some kinds of love, I've noticed, give out mighty soon, like a false seam in a mine that peters out when the owner thinks that he's got a long run. You believe yours is permanent?"

"Absolutely sure of it, sir, absolutely," Benbreck affirmed, with fervour.

"Well, it's a mighty good thing to be sure of," observed Mr. Fairhurst. "It's easy being foolish. It's easy being deluded into the belief that the fancy of the moment is cut out for all eternity, so to speak. That sort of mistake always leads to trouble in the end. In my country there are 500,000 divorces a year because of it. The divorce lawyer is an institution with us, and he flourishes like a green bay tree because multitudes of people go and get married that oughtn't to."

Benbreck exclaimed in astonishment.

Faces in the Mist

"Yes, sir, half a million divorces per annum, because people aren't sure of themselves at the start; and I reckon the same thing accounts for a tidy number on your side of the water. Now, I allow the divorce court has its uses. It cuts tangles. But it's messy, anyway. It rumples up reputations so that they're not worth having. Where it lays its hand, there's a splash of pitch that you can't rub out anyhow. And I see your Church is taking up the question. I mention these sentiments merely to show the need of care, from my point of view."

Benbreck smiled.

"I don't think there's any danger of that sort with us, sir," he returned, confidently.

"If there was," said Mr. Fairhurst, "the thing would stop right here. But I'm glad there isn't. My daughter hasn't yet taken me into her confidence in the matter; but I guess it's all right. Step No. 1, let us call it. Well, then, the attachment being O.K., we come to business. Isn't that so?"

Benbreck shuffled a trifle uneasily on his chair. The direct business method was disconcerting and unaristocratic. But he answered bravely enough, "I suppose that's it, sir."

"Best to know what we're doing," observed Mr. Fairhurst, placidly. "Naturally, you'll expect a settlement."

"Well, sir, you know the custom in families like mine," Benbreck replied, doing his best to smile.

"Something like this, I reckon," said Mr. Fairhurst, thoughtfully; "when the heir to a great and historic title thinks of marrying into a family that's got nothing to boast of in that line but a tolerably clean sheet, a name for hard work, fair dealing, and all that, he expects a consideration. You can go back a thousand years, more or less, and tick off your ancestors. I can't do anything like that with mine. No monu-

Mr. Fairhurst's New Deal

ments, no pages in history, hardly so much as visible tombstones."

"You have had the great honour, sir, of carving out your own fortune," said Benbreck, politely.

"No one else has carved it out for me, and that's a fact," agreed Mr. Fairhurst. "Only I don't lay stress on that. What I've done any other man can chip in and do—if he's fit. I started at the bottom of the ladder, right enough, and all the way up others were doing their best to push and jostle me off."

"It must be a rare satisfaction to succeed as you have done, Mr. Fairhurst," said Benbreck, in a burst of admiration.

"I'm not denying that it's pleasant to succeed," was the response. "It is, of course. And the man who says otherwise must have had Ananias for a forefather. Success enables a man to do heaps of things for himself and others that he wants badly to do. But it isn't everything. I mean success as men generally reckon it. Not by long odds. I've found that out. When I look back, I think of men I have known, Lord Benbreck, who hadn't a cent to their name, and I tell you quite frankly I admire and envy them. They got through this life and closed their accounts fairly and honourably, and if a man were to succeed in ten million undertakings, he couldn't do more than that."

He spoke with unwonted warmth. A man who did not wear his heart on his sleeve, he rarely let himself go. All the same, he had his own thoughts as he went along, and, without any pretensions as a philosopher, evolved a philosophy of life for himself.

"That's so, sir," Benbreck assented, with more conviction than he knew.

"I mention these things just to avoid sailing under false colours," pursued Mr. Fairhurst. "I never did, and I've no fancy to try now. Supposing, then,

Faces in the Mist

everything to be perfectly satisfactory to both sides. I'm prepared to help Pamela along. It's my duty, more or less. Besides, though her father says it, she is a nice girl, and deserves all her luck."

"She is something more than that, sir," Benbreck affirmed, with all a lover's ardour.

"I'm not going to contradict you," responded Mr. Fairhurst. "She is my only daughter, and—but I needn't enlarge to you on her merits. As to making her the future Countess of Dundalloch, that's a big deal, and needs careful thinking. Has Lord Dundalloch been consulted?"

"He knows of my fondness for Miss Fairhurst, sir."

"And doesn't object?"

"No, sir; on the contrary, he cordially approves."

"Step No. 2," said Mr. Fairhurst. "After that comes my approval, I reckon?"

"If you please, sir." In spite of his outward calm, Benbreck was quivering.

"Step No. 3," said Mr. Fairhurst. "We're getting along. Now, besides the settlement, which we can discuss in detail later on, is there anything else—any little extra, so to speak, not included in the general account? I guess Pam would like to begin house-keeping with a clean slate."

"Do you mean, sir, have I debts?"

It was nasty to take the plunge, but Benbreck thought it best to get it over at once. Mr. Fairhurst nodded.

"A few," Benbreck owned, flushing a little. "May I say again, sir, that you know the custom of families like mine."

"Recognised thing, I reckon, for young gentlemen of good family and spirit in England to have debts," said Mr. Fairhurst. "A man must do something. If he's not on the make he's on the spend, as we say."

Mr. Fairhurst's New Deal

Would Lord Dundalloch and yourself expect me in any way to take an interest in your debts?"

"I—I rather think that would be my father's idea, sir," Benbreck answered, as firmly as he could.

"Step No. 4," said Mr. Fairhurst. "For the present, that's far enough, I reckon. Now, if you don't mind, at your leisure—there's no kind of hurry, I guess—giving me a rough statement of the nature and amount of your debts, we'll get right down to rock bottom in this interesting business."

Benbreck blinked in spite of himself. "The nature and amount of your debts"—here was a pill for a lord to swallow! Outside, and free to relieve his feelings, he would have vented them in blazing language. Inside, and confronting Mr. Fairhurst, the fire had to be suppressed. But it raged within. His debts to be made the subject of inquiry by—by an American! A stinging sensation shot down the centre of his being, calling the peer in him to arms. He came meaning to state terms, as was manifestly his right. And lo! a proposal for investigation! Was he expected to chaffer and bargain like a huckster, haggle over his honours like a petty tradesman over cheap ware, tabulate a statement of his affairs like a common debtor in the Bankruptcy Court? That was something for the Dundalloch pride to stomach if it could. He felt an inclination to laugh derisively.

It may be explained that to my lord's mind (as to others of his kidney) Americans are permitted to accumulate wealth chiefly for paying the debts of spirited British noblemen, and making splendid settlements in exchange for a title. That obviously was the right thing. Yet here was an American who, instead of leaping greedily at a coronet, calmly said there was no hurry, and actually proposed a statement of debts. Heyday, what next?

Benbreck regretted that he had not, as a preliminary,

Faces in the Mist

gone to Mrs. Fairhurst. She understood the glories of the British peerage, and would not grudge the rate at which she might become a satellite or pendant. Mr. Fairhurst was perfectly polite, perfectly complaisant. Benbreck found no fault with his manner. But his sense of the fitness of things and his proposal were something more than preposterous.

"Don't you find the cigar to your taste?" he inquired, fanning a rift in the cloud of blue smoke. Benbreck started.

"Oh, quite to my taste, thank you—quite," he answered, in some confusion.

"I see it's gone out," said Mr. Fairhurst. "Have a light." He struck a match and held it out. Benbreck leaned forward, the dead cigar between his lips.

"Doesn't seem to go well," observed Mr. Fairhurst, watching. "Have another. Relighted cigars are no good, anyway. Should have remembered that."

Once more he proffered his cigar case. Benbreck mechanically selected another cigar, and for a little while the two smoked in silence. Then Mr. Fairhurst remarked, in a tone of rumination, "You don't happen to remember the amount of your liabilities—approximately, you understand?" This time Benbreck fanned away the smoke.

"Afraid not, sir," he answered. There was a smile on his face, but his lips were strangely compressed.

"Don't matter," observed Mr. Fairhurst, cheerfully. "We're on holiday, anyway. Come in, Susie," he called, in the next breath, as a face peered round the corner of the half-open door. Mrs. Fairhurst entered smiling, as she looked from one to the other with an eye of tentative inquiry.

"Just been talking to Pam," she remarked, glancing significantly at Benbreck, "but can't get any con-

Mr. Fairhurst's New Deal

versation out of her. Seems to be moonstruck or something." Mr. Fairhurst chuckled robustly.

"Carry your mind back, and see if ever you were moonstruck, Susie," he said. "It appears Pam is a woman and has owned up. Lord Benbreck has just been telling me." Mrs. Fairhurst turned to Lord Benbreck in the utter amazement of one who had suspected nothing.

"Well, I declare!" she cried. "Well, I declare!" But her astonishment could not keep back the radiant, wreathed smile.

"That's about the size of it, Susie," observed Mr. Fairhurst. "The world gets along even if old folks should be sleeping. And now, everybody being more or less moonstruck and happy, I guess we'll have something to eat. Come, Lord Benbreck. Come, Susie. I reckon we needn't expect Pam," he added, as an afterthought.

CHAPTER X

GRACIOUS BUT COY

MERELY tantalising at Cairo, at Damascus Pamela was positively exasperating. She was all caprice and riotous activity. A lover's devotion seemed naught to her. Was Benbreck disposed to be tender, she instantly became engrossed in the strange scenes about her. Did he look at her fondly as the preface to an ardent speech, something extraneous at once stirred her curiosity or incited to adventure. She seemed to discern his intentions afar off and to take a freakish pleasure in thwarting them. Thus, when, in the legal phrase of his country, he would have emitted a declaration, she broke out as if coronets were but baubles for children, or American girls would not ordinarily cut each other's throats to secure one.

"Isn't it perfectly enchanting?" she asked with malicious radiance. "These wonders absorb one. Let us explore and enjoy them while we may. Doesn't the romance of it fairly make you tingle?"

"No," he answered. "Can't say it does."

"Almost makes my head light," she rejoined gaily. "Think of it—ancient and modern brought together in this one spot as they are nowhere else in all the wide world."

He could not in the circumstances get up enthusiasm, but owned the scene was wonderful enough in its way. Then, in a spirit of gallantry, he recalled

Gracious but Coy

one of the few couplets that chanced to stick in his mind from meagre and casual reading.

"Some fellow or other," he remarked, "once let himself go on

The glory that was Greece,
And the grandeur that was Rome.

Must have been deucedly fine, you know, by all accounts. But the poet might have come to Damascus and been equally delighted."

For once he was proud of the scanty knowledge that enabled him to make this timely and appropriate dip into poetry—an article, as he remarked, that was not much in his line. And he had his reward in a quick, eager smile of approval.

"So you've been reading our Edgar Allan Poe," she said. "Yes, Greece and Rome were very fine, of course; but before they were heard of or had any thoughts of giving themselves airs, Damascus was piling up antiquities. The city of Abraham—think of it! David, too, was here in the character of a conquering warrior. The victory cost the other side twenty-two thousand lives. Then, as the Bible quaintly tells us, 'The Syrians became servants to David and brought him presents.' Like David, wasn't it?" Benbreck pursed his lips. "Yes, I suppose so. Able to look after number one, like most of his race." He spoke feelingly, having experience of them on the financial side.

"Pity Michal didn't appreciate him," said Pamela. Benbreck looked at her curiously.

"Would you?" he asked.

"Would any woman of sense?" she laughed. "David was splendid. I don't mean that he was exactly a drawing-room hero. He wasn't, of course, though I guess he could take his part all right in a musical at home. But he did things, and did them handsomely, too."

Faces in the Mist

"And women like a man who does things handsomely?"

"What do you think?" she replied, laughingly. Benbreck became dry.

"Can't say I remember the doings of the heroic David in detail," he said, with an air of boredom. He wished to indicate as politely but also as clearly as possible that he was not interested in David and his exploits, and would gladly have them dismissed.

"They're as rousing as a first-rate tale of adventure," Pamela assured him mischievously. "In fact, they *are* a first-rate tale of adventure. Should read about them when you have time. Later on the soldiers of Alexander came here."

"Another hero," observed Benbreck, dubiously.

"First-class," agreed Pamela, nothing abashed.

"Rather given to liquor, wasn't he?" said Benbreck, with a sardonic grin. "But I dare say a good enough man to his wife when he was sober. Beat her only when he was in drink, perhaps."

"Then she wasn't beaten by a mean man, anyway," Pamela retorted, a touch of malice in her laughter. Benbreck compressed his lips. This form of hero-worship was taking a distinctly distasteful turn.

"Then, again," she pursued, disregarding all symptoms of displeasure. "After a long, long time came Saladin, another hero. He brought the crusaders, with Richard Cœur de Lion—*your* Richard—in his track. Saladin and Richard fought." Benbreck pricked up at that.

"Do you happen to remember which of them won?" he asked.

"Oh, Richard did."

"Good!" cried Benbreck. "Rather admire Richard. He knew, at any rate, how to slash off Saracen heads."

"And did it with infectious zest," Pamela agreed. "There was no slouching when Richard was about."

Gracious but Coy

And he had the grace to admire Saladin. But I guess one brave man always does admire another brave man." She regarded him meaningly. "I have heard Carew say that it's always the sign of a good sportsman to treat an opponent in sportsman-like fashion. That's what Richard did; that's what most heroes do."

She paused a moment as though to note the effect of her statement, and then proceeded: "Well, you see Damascus has been a good deal mixed up with interesting men and things in the course of its history. As for the empires, monarchies, republics, tyrannies, oligarchies, democracies, and what not that historians make a fuss about, it has seen more of them than one can count at an easy reckoning start up, bustle and flicker out. And all the time it was here, among its gardens and orchards, eating its fruit, smelling its flowers, listening to the rush of many streams, sluiced from the parent river Elbarada. It managed to have a good, exciting time, too, as it went along. No stagnation, no ennui, no tedious leisure, given up to yawning. Oh, Damascus has lived right along, and is living now, as keenly as its youngest rival."

The seething, variegated streets furnished apt confirmation of her words. To the medley of colour and costume, the hubbub of strident speech, every nation under heaven seemed to have contributed its quota. Princes of commerce, Turkish merchants for most part, in luxurious silk dresses and opulent turbans; tawny, fierce-eyed Bedouins in keffiyeh, coarse aba and fantastic red boots; swaggering, aggressive soldiers in blue and orange; Greeks and Armenians, Persians and Kurds, Druses from Lebanon, Abyssinians, Jews, all in characteristic garb; veiled, white-robed women, gliding hither and thither, like curious but uneasy ghosts; high officials on superb horses, superbly

Faces in the Mist

caparisoned ; lesser dignitaries on camels decorated with almost equal richness ; vendors of sherbet clinking their brass cups, beggars exhibiting their rags and their sores ; donkeys and dogs—strangely contrasted, constantly choking streams and eddies of life ; and in the midst of the Oriental confusion, like an incongruous importation from the West, a railway station, screeching, puffing locomotives, and the electric light. All this gave Pamela fair excuse for owning herself fascinated.

From a variety of motives she made the most of it. But even Mrs. Fairhurst found the novelty of scene and association strong enough to divert her a moment from her hot pursuit. Mr. Fairhurst, like his daughter, abandoned himself to the diversions and enchantments of the hour, drinking in the rare experience, as it were, at every pore. Everything charmed—the white houses peeping from amid clustered foliage, the bowery turns in apricot orchard and citron grove, the shady vine, fig, pomegranate and palm, the roses and jessamine trees, the bloom, the fragrance, and, not least, the gleam of fountain and swish of stream.

"They call this Paradise, don't they?" he remarked to Benbreck, in unaffected delight.

"Yes, I believe they do," was the answer.

"And they are right. It is Paradise, especially alongside of the desert. That's what makes it so mighty fine and striking—the contrast. Happiness, I reckon, is mostly just a matter of contrast."

Like a boy, and unlike an American, he frankly gave himself up to wonder, probed native life, patronised bazaars, drank sherbet and coffee, smoked his narghileh, devoured Turkish delight, dined at *café's* built over gurgling water for the sake of coolness, enjoyed everything, felt miraculously young.

Carew, yet more ardent for adventure, went forth

Gracious but Coy

with a dragoman of proved honesty and ability to see things for himself, Haroun Alraschid and the Arabian Nights running in his head. The Barada easily became the Tigris; as easily under the glamour of the moon the wonderland of Damascus took the form of:

Bagdat's shrines of fretted gold,
High-walled gardens green and old,

and he imagined himself a good Mussulman bent on a romantic lark.

But the modern in him was not to be cast out. One night, after a feast of Oriental sight-seeing, he found himself brought to a halt by the white flare of the electric light. Then, as at a blown breath, Haroun Alraschid and Bagdat and the Tigris, with all their marvels and witcheries, vanished. That burning far-seen arc, Carew told himself, held more real romance than all the wondrous tales, the gorgeous palaces, the dim, cellar-like bazaars, picturesque costume and antique fashion of a doomed civilisation. For one thing it declared triumphantly the arrival of the man from the West.

"And when he takes hold of the Orient, then the Orient begins to hum," thought Carew, touched to a fine exaltation by pride of race. "He's beginning to make it hum here. I'll go and call on him. To the railway depôt," he told his dragoman abruptly. "The railway for Medina, you understand," he added, lest it might be thought he planned a mere trip to Aleppo.

CHAPTER XI

CAREW'S JEOPARDY

THE dragoman looked perplexed and a trifle scared. What was he to gainsay my lord's word? But was my lord in earnest? Did he mean to perform the Hajj or simple pilgrimage, or did he yearn for the Hajj-al-Akbar or great pilgrimage, to win the everlasting glory of the green turban of the Haji? If so, the time, in Arab phrase, was not the time. The dragoman prostrated himself for presuming to hint any opposition to my lord's wishes, but my lord was a stranger and might not understand. For behold, was not the Hedjaz Railway exclusively for such as were obeying the behests of the Prophet? Moreover, the faithful carried daggers under their cloaks.

"I guess I'm going right in there," Carew replied, pointing to some sheds over which the electric light burned. "We'll see about the Hajj and the green turban and all that later on. By the way, the Prophet lies in Medina, doesn't he?"

"Of a surety," replied the dragoman. "The Prophet's tomb is in Medina. When Mecca cast him forth with stonings and shameful revilings, then fled he to Medina, which took him in and so became the second Holy City. And behold! is not his tomb there to this day, guarded that no unbeliever's eye may rest on it?"

"Sure he's there?" said Carew.

"Of a certainty he is there," replied the dragoman earnestly, "within the Masjid-al-Nabawi, the Prophet's

Carew's Jeopardy

Mosque in the Hujrah, which is to say the chamber under the green dome, which you may see afar off, shining like a pillar of heavenly light. There is he buried."

"Not buried in as many places as his daughter, the Lady Fatimah, then," remarked Carew.

The dragoman looked at him suspiciously. For a trifling extra fee, and with a wink of secrecy, he had shown the "true tomb" of Fatimah at Damascus, though all official Islam holds she lies in Medina near her illustrious father. Carew laughed lightly.

"Ever heard of Homer?" he inquired. "No; not in your line, eh? Well, he is buried in nearly a dozen different places, so I guess it's all right about Fatimah. Now let us get right along."

He started as he spoke. The dragoman stood a moment, debating whether to follow or return and give the alarm. For this tempting of Allah could not go unpunished. There was fear of blood in his heart, but what troubled him was not the probable fate of a Nazarene (Nazarenes were all pestilent); a disaster would interfere with business, and in any case there were his fees to be considered. So he reluctantly followed the figure that made its way with outrageous speed through the crowd to forbidden things. When questioned by soldiers and others concerning the audacities of his charge, he shrugged his shoulders, and contorted his face as if words were futile to express his sense of folly. But when the soldiers scowled and spoke rudely, he replied, jerking the head at Carew: "Vex me not. He is mad. It is the hand of Allah."

"Then shall he be meat for dogs," growled a soldier, fingering his gun suggestively. The dragoman made a gesture of despair.

"He owes me money," he said, in tones of supplication. "Withhold thy hand till he has paid, then shalt thou do to him all that is in thy heart. Ah!

Faces in the Mist

these Nazarenes, they be bold as lions, and perverse as Beelzebub."

He ran forward, and plucked at Carew's coat-tail.

"Come back!" he urged, in a wild pant. "They like not thy going. We are in peril."

Carew surveyed him calmly.

"From whom or what?" was the response.

The dragoman made a gesture that seemed to include the whole community.

"They will cut our throats," he said. "Yea, they will thrust us through and cast us to the dogs."

"That frowsy, baggy lot?" said Carew, looking round the soldiers of the Sublime Porte. "Johnny, you're afraid. If anything happens to me, you go straight to the American Consul and tell him that an American citizen has been molested while going quietly about his own business in the streets of Damascus. He'll see to it all right, I guess. Meanwhile, if it would ease your mind, you can tell these degenerate savages that in the event of unpleasantness a few American battleships will take a trip up the Bosphorus and call on the Sultan. Then God help the man who was to blame down here. As for yourself, if you're really afraid, go home."

"Only for thee, O lord," said the dragoman, salaaming humbly.

"That's mighty good of you," Carew returned, "only you needn't take on about me. The American flag is a good enough insurance, I reckon. And, anyway, I'm going on. See!" And turning he proceeded, striding as if no weapons lurked in the dark, and no hostile eyes spied upon infidels.

Near the station he came upon a great crowd, clamorously excited. Some public function, he made out; an inspection or something of the kind had taken place down the line towards Medina, and the

Carew's Jeopardy

people were flocking to greet dignitaries and officials on their return. The sacred railway, one told another, was complete almost to the gates of the Holy City. Events unparalleled in the history of Islam were, in fact, happening, and the people, catching the infection of excitement one from another, were beside themselves.

On they swept, orderly but inflammable, to a square near the station, where they surged and eddied like a running sea suddenly brought up by precipices. To pass the time or gratify the national sentiment, an Arab, mounting some stone steps, made an impassioned speech in his native tongue, and then it appeared the railway was not the sole cause of the tumult. The Sultan, the mysterious potentate far away in Constantinople who, to vast multitudes, controls the destinies of the universe, this mighty dispenser of good and evil had been gracious; he had given his people a Constitution, ensuring freedom and justice, above all, justice. And it came (here was the point for the devout), it came with the completion of the Hedjaz Railway.

"Great and doubly great is the sacred railway," cried the Arab orator. "It is the wonder of the ages, and will endure for ever; but mark you this, the Prophet did not permit it to approach the Holy City until the Khalif had granted the people a Constitution."

The two, Constitution and railway, were bound together; both gifts to the faithful. The applause evoked by the fiery little speech was a tornado, and while it raged, suddenly from the south there broke in the piercing shriek of a locomotive.

The orator leaped from his perch; with one impulse the vast throng turned and made for the station gates, through cordons of soldiers who either could not or would not hold them back. After all, the occasion was joyous; these people were celebrating the praises

Faces in the Mist

of the Sultan ; and why shed blood ? So the people surged on, carrying Carew with them, and separating him from the dragoman. They rushed the gates, they took possession of the still unfinished platform, pushing, scrambling, gesticulating, bandying compliments, screeching their joy. Then, in an instant, as at the waving of a conductor's baton, every voice was silent, every quivering body still, and into that throbbing, breathless, gleaming, close-packed mass the train slowly steamed. The driver, rubbing his hands with a pickle of waste, smiled upon them from the footplate.

"Ach Himmel!" he remarked to his mate, "they are as children out to behold new wonders!"

"They are fools and inhospitable," responded the other, wiping his brow. "Down the desert ways it is hot and dusty, and they bring no lager. Ach!"

The man from the West had indeed arrived.

From a special coach behind, the notabilities were alighting one by one. First came the military governor, a soldier known and admired throughout the whole Ottoman Empire, and he had an ovation that wreathed his wrinkled face in smiles, and made him proceed in one long salute. There followed this Pasha and that, this and that great official or grandee, all named, all cheered jubilantly. Then there stepped lightly out a tall, erect figure wearing a sun helmet and a white linen jacket, British fashion. He was the youngest of all, yet the crowd named him with rousing enthusiasm.

"Chisholm Bey!" they shouted, "Chisholm Bey!" and cheered deliriously. He doffed his cap, bowed smiling, and passed on after the others along the open passage kept for them.

Carew gave a great cry and sprang forward, driving like a wedge through the crowd. A volley of maledictions followed him.

Carew's Jeopardy

"Who is he that butts like a ram or a goat of the rocks?" one demanded angrily.

"A profane unbeliever, a Nazarene; smite him!" cried another.

"Let his blood atone for this insolence!" added a third.

But Carew, wriggling and slipping like an eel among water flags, managed to evade them. Where wriggling failed he pushed, shouldered and elbowed, and that brought more maledictions.

"Let us cast this dog forth!" a rough voice suggested.

"Yea," chimed in another, "he pollutes our religion!"

A knot of fanatics gripping weapons fiercely made at him; but in the same moment, panting, sweating, hatless, he seized Kenneth's arm.

"Chisholm!" he gasped, "Chisholm!"

Chisholm turned as if hit.

"Carew Fairhurst!" he cried, by no means sure he was not seeing a vision. "Where on earth have you sprung from, or how did you get here?"

"Don't quite know," was the panting but happy response. "Only I think there are men behind wanting my blood pretty badly." There was not a minute to lose, not a moment for speech.

"Slip in here in front of me," Chisholm whispered, "and as you value your life be circumspect."

He glanced back as if to reckon the danger. But the would-be avengers had hastily thrust away their weapons. The man was a friend of Chisholm Bey, the great engineer, one of the makers of the Sacred Railway, and reported to be in high favour at Constantinople itself. That was enough, pending develop-

CHAPTER XII

CHISHOLM BEY

KNOWING the ways of Moslem fanatics, and the sacredness of the Sacred Railway, the dragoman remarked to himself that beyond peradventure the fool, his employer, was lost.

"And I am not yet paid," he reflected. "Wherefore am I punished thus? Truly here is calamity when my wife clamours for a new divan, and for the sake of peace I would buy her ornaments of gold."

Tardily—for why hasten a tale of catastrophe?—and with as much agitation as a Syrian is ever capable of exhibiting, he returned to make his melancholy report. He overflowed with regrets and abject apologies, but what was he? The multitude was great, and very fierce. Yea, it swallowed his deluded charge as the sea swallows a spent swimmer.

"Did you not warn him of the danger?" Mr. Fairhurst demanded sharply.

"Warn him, O mightiness?" replied the dragoman. "As with a tongue of flame I warned him, telling him there were bloodthirsty men and hostile weapons in the assembly. Indeed, of a truth, I warned him. But he heeded me not. Nay, he made a jest of me, saying that if aught befel him the battleships of his nation would visit the great Sultan at Constantinople. Surely Allah sent madness upon the beautiful young man! Kismet! Who can fathom the mysteries?"

He spoke with a choking sorrow, and all the unction of helpless innocence. But not all stayed to hear him

Chisholm Bey

to the end. At the first word of disaster, Pamela, stifling a cry of terror, left the room, whipped up a loose outer garment, which she flung over her shoulders, and ran back.

"Come," she ordered the dragoman, cutting short his lamentations, "and show the way. Father, Lord Benbreck, will you come, too?"

She turned and made for the street, the others delaying half a moment to pick up hats. Outside she began to run; but she had not gone a hundred yards when of a sudden she halted. Two figures approached in the moonlight, arm in arm, and a cheery voice sang out, "Hallo, Pam, where are you off to now?" It was Carew, holding fast to Kenneth as to a prisoner who must not on any account be allowed to escape.

"This has been a night, and no mistake!" Carew continued to the stupefied and staring Pamela as the pair came up. "Talk of the Arabian Nights, they're not in it! Whoo! Let me present my friend Mr. Chisholm, Mr. Kenneth Chisholm, late of the Highlands," and with a deft movement he swung Kenneth forward.

"Oh!" said Pamela, with a gasp that tore at the roots of her heart, and again, "Oh!"

Her head was singing, millions of darting fire-flecks filled the air, her arteries had all gone mad. She scarcely knew what was happening. Kenneth, too, was palpitating wildly. The dragoman watched in stony amazement. His jaw dropped. Chisholm Bey with these strangers! Carew alive! It was incredible. The Prophet must be punishing him with false visions. Carew grinned in amused satisfaction at the general confusion.

"Guess it's a stunner all right," he remarked. "Aren't you going to shake hands, Pam? Kind of make things easy, I reckon."

Pamela promptly held out her hand, and Kenneth

Faces in the Mist

bowed over it. In the same moment Benbreck rushed up, closely followed by Mr. and Mrs. Fairhurst, the latter ejaculating as she ran. Instantly Pamela recovered her self-possession.

"Here's a wonder!" she told the astonished, wondering, and delighted group. "Carew and Mr. Chisholm!"

Promptly stepping forward, Mr. Fairhurst wrung Kenneth's hand with a grip of exuberant gladness. Mrs. Fairhurst, too, evinced her delight. But Benbreck stood back, obviously freezing. Pamela turned to him.

"Mr. Chisholm," she said, with studied quiet. "You know him."

Benbreck inclined his head a nail's breadth forward, but held out no welcoming hand. The crimson blazed in Pamela's face, and her eyes glowed dangerously. But her mother was speaking in the broken accents of overwhelming joy.

"Thought you were killed," she was saying to Carew.

"So I was, mother, very nearly," Carew responded blithely. "If it wasn't for Chisholm Bey, and his influence with the almighty Turk, I guess there'd been a funeral all right—that is, if the fragments of deceased could have been picked up."

He laughed boyishly.

"You saved him?" Mr. Fairhurst said, turning gratefully to Kenneth.

"The crowd happened to know me, that's all," was the modest reply.

"No discounting, please," put in Carew. "Saved me all right. I tell you, Chisholm Bey is a friend worth having round here."

"Well, anyway, you're saved," said Mr. Fairhurst, noting that a crowd was gathering. "Come right along inside till we can thank you properly," he added to Kenneth. "Glad my son brought you."

Chisholm Bey

"This is a real pleasure, I assure you, apart from your service."

The company turned to go indoors, and whether by chance or design, Pamela walked beside Kenneth, a certain insuppressible elation in carriage and mien. Benbreck was in the rear, and partly from habit, partly from courtesy, Mrs. Fairhurst waited for him. Carew was behind with the still dumfounded dragoman.

"Glad to see you're all right, Johnny," he said briskly. "Just as well you didn't come inside. Crowd a bit queer and uncertain in temper. Might have compromised you; and business is business. Come round to-morrow, and we'll plan something else. Now I guess it's time for prayers."

The dragoman salaamed in profound respect. A friend of Chisholm Bey must needs be a great man; in his own land a man of the first consequence.

"Verily, my lord is in the protection of Allah," he said, with unction.

"That's good doctrine," Carew agreed heartily. "In my country we have a proverb that Allah helps them who help themselves."

"Verily it must be so," said the dragoman, impressively. "Allah bestows the power. It is ours to be diligent in using it."

"Johnny, you ought to be a preacher," returned Carew, with contagious good-humour. "Well, there's no need to bother the American Consul, anyway, and mess up things generally. Good-night, Johnny!"

"Peace be with my lord, may his sleep be sweet!" returned the dragoman, bowing himself.

"Same to you!" Carew called over his shoulder. The dragoman watched the lithe, active figure till it glided into the shadow of jessamine trees and was lost in the darkness.

"Verily these Nazarenes are a wonder!" he com-

Faces in the Mist

mented. "They have money without stint. They perform miracles. They know not fear. And Chisholm Bey is one of them."

That explained Carew's miraculous escape. Chisholm Bey had but to lift a hand, and, lo, the raging of the faithful was as the cooing of doves. Truly, the Sacred Railway was bringing strange things to pass.

Leading the way, Mr. Fairhurst pushed open what appeared to be a crazy door in a crumbling wall, and disclosed the enticements of a spacious patio, or courtyard, manifestly a purlieu of luxury. In the centre a fountain murmured, its spray gleaming ethereally in the moonlight, and all round masses of blossomy trees gave their fragrance to the night breeze like gently waving censers. Then passing under a portico supported by marble columns exquisitely ornamented, the party entered a large outer room or hall, luxuriously furnished with chairs and couches. The polished floor, too, was spread with splendid rugs, in case visitors should care to recline or squat Oriental fashion. On one of these Carew threw himself with a long, gusty sigh of comfort.

"After bustle, rest," he remarked philosophically. "Been a bit exciting to-night, I must own."

The others disposed themselves variously, western style, Pamela again, whether by accident or design, being near Kenneth. Then the sherbet and lemonade, which are the pride of Damascus, were brought in by turbaned, velvet-footed servants, whose movements were as the gliding of shadows. Coffee and Turkish delight were added, and (the ladies permitting) narghilehs and cigarettes.

Questioned by Pamela concerning his naughtiness, Carew related his experiences of the evening with the zest of a boy over forbidden exploits. When he ended, Kenneth was adroitly induced to contribute notes on Moslem life, manners and customs, interwoven

Chisholm Bey

incidentally with personal adventures, modestly suggested, however, rather than described. Pamela spoke little, but she listened much. Like Desdemona in the hour of her destiny, she heard not with her ears only, but with her whole, rapt, sensitive, receptive being. Her eyes glistened, her breath came now quick and sharp, now in long-drawn, half-suppressed sighs as the narrative rose and fell. Carew, supping delightfully on excitement, cried out, "Bully for the Sacred Railway. Must be jolly fine to be engineering out here. Romantic if you like."

"Fairly," smiled Kenneth, "if you don't mind dust and heat and a few other things."

"Such as what?" Carew asked, his eyes dancing with joy.

"The faithful as you saw them to-night, for example. At times they're even more troublesome than you found them. Then the Sublime Porte watches with a jealous eye, and wants to know everything. Tomorrow morning it'll be known in the highest official circles that I am here to-night."

"And what might that mean?" Carew asked.

"A diplomatic hint to be careful."

"And if that's not treated with proper respect, what then?"

"An accident down the line, an affray in the dark," laughed Kenneth. "In any case the dead body of a man who would not learn prudence."

Carew whistled softly.

"Exciting, all right," he remarked crisply. Pamela thrilled to the marrow, like a child afraid over ghost stories but greedy for more.

"Then are—are you running such risks by coming here?" she asked, a tremor in her voice.

"We are permitted to make formal visits," was the answer.

"Then," put in Mr. Fairhurst, emphatically, "there

Faces in the Mist

must be no embarrassing questions. Eastern walls, as we know, have ears, and Eastern listeners imaginations. The Sacred Railway I understand is—sacred."

Kenneth nodded.

"For the present," he said, "some of us are here merely because we happen to be useful, not because we're loved or revered. All the same, the thin end of the wedge is in."

"You mean the New Constitution," said Mr. Fairhurst. "That's a mighty big thing, isn't it?"

"A revolution," Kenneth replied, "silent, but effectual. Islam draws breath with a sense of new life. The Germans, Britons, and other Western folk have arrived, bringing their ideas with them. The Prophet's Mosque at Medina is lighted by electricity. After that, anything."

"You don't say," responded Mr. Fairhurst, in surprise. "But it's a fact there's nothing half so revolutionary as ideas. Many times in the course of its history, they have set the world ablaze, and they seem to be working pretty actively now. Let an idea be launched by the right man, and it may turn whole nations upside down. What would Mahomet say to the electric light in his Mosque?"

"They say he approves," Kenneth returned. "And that the sign of his approval is the New Constitution. That is our safeguard down in the way of the wilderness."

When presently Kenneth rose to go Pamela turned to Benbreck, her face strangely aglow.

"The moonlight is beautiful outside in the patio," she remarked sweetly. "Let us go out."

Benbreck rose briskly enough, but he was little prepared for what followed. At the outer door Mr. and Mrs. Fairhurst again thanked their visitor profusely, and got a promise that he would come again.

"It's real good to see you," Mrs. Fairhurst declared,

Chisholm Bey

touched by the general spirit of exuberance and geniality. "What talks we can have when we all get back to Bruan!"

"Without spies," whispered Mr. Fairhurst as he wrung Chisholm's hand.

Carew stepped out into the street with his friend, Pamela promptly did the same, and Benbreck followed reluctantly a step or two in the rear. Save my lord, they were all in the gayest of gay moods. It seemed that Pamela had forgotten there ever was an unpleasant passage between Kenneth and herself; and Kenneth for his part appeared content to have it so. But suddenly, with one of her lightning transitions, she turned to him.

"Mr. Chisholm," she said, her voice vibrating like a taut string, "once I did you a great wrong."

He looked at her questioningly. She was quite close, and returned his gaze straight and unflinching. There are times when fear itself is a spur to courage, when the affrighted heart incites madly to action. Pamela had come on such a time. The opportunity for which she longed almost with despair was hers. It must not be missed; and she had no thought of sparing herself.

"At Bruan Castle," she went on, "I behaved badly to you, I was not justified. I am sorry. Will you forgive me?"

She held out both her hands with the simplicity of a child and he took them almost unconsciously. An electric current tingled through her as their fingers met and clasped, but her pleading eyes were steady.

"I have been waiting for this," she said. "I am at your mercy. Do you pardon?"

For one moment Pamela beheld the grave, concerned eyes that looked at her out of the mist by the Cairn Dhu Crag. Then came the answer, quietly and deliberately.

Faces in the Mist

"Not on those terms." She caught her breath sharply.

"On what terms, then?" she asked in dismay.

"Make your own. I deserve punishment."

She was trembling, he could feel the tremor of her hands, and might have heard the thud of her heart. Nevertheless, her bearing was superb.

"I decline the overture," he said, a smile breaking the gravity of his face. "You are not at my mercy, Miss Fairhurst." A new light sprang to her eyes.

"Very well, then," she cried, as one who perfectly understands. "We make it up without fuss, is that it?"

"If you grant me that privilege," he answered in a low voice.

"That is noble of you," she said, in a quick breath.

"Noble, noble."

Then all at once she turned to Benbreck, who stood watching in a horror of indignation. Had she suddenly gone mad? he was asking himself. He had his answer speedily.

"Lord Benbreck," she said, "you, too, are concerned in this. Will you do me a favour?"

"Any favour a gentleman may grant a lady," he replied, bowing.

"Good," she responded. "I will ask no more than that." Then turning to Kenneth, "Mr. Chisholm, will you do me a similar favour?" Kenneth, too, bowed in assent.

"Then," she cried, radiantly, stepping back, and looking from one to the other, "I want you two to be friends. Please shake hands."

Kenneth instantly advanced a pace, his hand held out freely, but, simultaneously, Lord Benbreck stepped back, his head in the air, his arms folded defiantly.

CHAPTER XIII

WAR IN THE CAMP

UTTERLY taken aback Pamela stared at him a full half minute, her wits in a blank suspense. Then a sudden fire of anger blazed up in her face. One affront, it seemed, was not enough. It must be repeated with aggravations. This time it was made double, to Kenneth and to herself. Hot, bitter words leaped to her tongue; she had an impulse to speak out, to humiliate and overwhelm the insulter on the spot. Something—who knows what?—checked her. She turned to Kenneth a face that said plainly through its flaming indignation, "A lord's manners, you see. Never mind. He shall not go unpunished for this." What she actually spoke was: "Thank you, I will not forget this additional debt. We are to see you to-morrow?"

Kenneth, too, blazed fiercely. But Pamela's look and smile would blot out a thousand insults.

"Mr. Fairhurst was good enough to ask me, and I promised to come if possible," he returned.

"Please make it possible," she pleaded, her eyes saying unmistakeable things. "We *all* want you so much."

Benbreck did not fail to note her coaxing, entreating tone. Neither did he miss the emphasis on the "all."

"You are very good, Miss Fairhurst," Kenneth responded. "I will come, then—that is," he added with a little laugh, "unless the Turks put me in chains or otherwise prevent me."

Faces in the Mist

Benbreck turned away, his mouth pursed contemptuously. Something in the sky appeared to attract his attention. Perhaps he felt the stars alone were lofty enough for him. He heard more words that were as acid dropped into the wounds of his pride; and then like a gust of wind Pamela whisked past him, her head at least as high and contemptuous as his own. He dropped his eyeglass in amazement, replaced it and gazed after her a minute.

"Hoity-toity," he commented mentally. "Is it to be a Dundaloch *versus* a Chisholm, then? I must decline the contest."

He felt inclined to laugh. But his father's words sounded like a note of warning in his ears. "Think what we could do with a million."

With a chastened spirit he followed as swiftly as was consistent with the dignity of the peerage. When he got indoors Pamela had disappeared, but Mrs. Fairhurst met him beaming, gracious, ebullient as usual. He stopped a minute, wavering whether to give any hint of the situation, decided against it, made a jest and passed on. But on his heels came Carew, full of an excitement that was not to be hidden.

"More adventures?" his mother inquired, shrewdly.

"Yes, of a kind," was the abrupt answer.

"I wish you would be careful," she told him, reproachfully. "You'll overdo it some day, and there'll be trouble you won't set right. Ever since we left London you've kept me in one long shiver. Remember you're not in New York, and for goodness sake restrain yourself."

He regarded her fixedly, his mouth drawn tight, a keen, questioning look in his eyes. Should he tell her?

"I'm all right," he remarked, in an offhand way.

"Where is Pam?"

"Got a glimpse of her a minute ago going to her

War in the Camp

own room, I think," was the reply. He made a movement as if passing on, changed his mind and swung back.

"Did she say anything?" he asked. His mother instantly spied danger.

"Nothing," she answered, with a look of alarm. "Is there anything the matter?" Carew hesitated, as if debating whether to answer.

"Tell me, is there anything the matter?" his mother repeated, her alarm growing.

"Nothing much, I guess," returned Carew, his eyes fast on hers.

"There is," she cried, "there is. Why are you so mysterious?" Then the thought, the fear, so often at her heart leaped forth. "Has anything happened between Lord Benbreck and herself?"

"Look here, mother," said Carew, "if I tell you something, you must keep it to yourself, for the present, at any rate. You'll hear it from others later on, I guess. Something has happened. Lord Benbreck has insulted Pam." Mrs. Fairhurst was aghast.

"Lord Benbreck insulted Pam," she echoed as one at whose feet a pit suddenly yawns.

"Yes," said Carew. "A bad case, too. I was present." Mrs. Fairhurst was shaking.

"Whatever's happened now?" she demanded, tragically.

"It's an old story," Carew told her. "Perhaps you know, and perhaps you don't, but at any rate it's a fact that the Dundallochs and the Chisholms have for some considerable time been neighbours without being exactly friends. Appears that what is now part of the Dundalloch estates used to be part of the Chisholm property. The transfer caused bad blood. Some sharp practice, I reckon, kind of Jacob and Esau business. Anyway, there was trouble

Faces in the Mist

which didn't become less bitter as time passed. Well, as the result of this there was some flare up between Benbreck and Chisholm that big night at Bruan. Pamela blamed Chisholm wrongly. She found that out, and naturally wanted to put things straight. But she never got a chance till to-night. In the trying moment Chisholm was as generous as could be. You could see yourself to-night he bore no ill-feeling. Pam could scarcely get mentioning her error before it was forgiven. I tell you Chisholm's behaviour was a lesson in chivalry. Well, having made her own peace, she wanted the two men to be friends also. She asked each of them if he would grant her a certain favour to be named. Both promised, and she told them to shake hands. Again Chisholm was ready, but when he held out his hand Benbreck drew back so——." He imitated the high scorn and insulting look of his lordship. "As you may imagine, Pam was cut. Never saw her redden so in her life before. She construes the thing as an insult both to herself and to our guest; and by Jiminy, if you ask me I think she's right."

"There must be some mistake," wailed Mrs. Fairhurst, fighting the awful thoughts that besieged her. "Some dreadful mistake; there must be."

"Yes, I guess there is," Carew agreed. "The mistake of bringing Benbreck here at all. And I reckon you'd better see to it, mother, that he apologises or quits."

"Quits!" The word struck Mrs. Fairhurst with all the dread of doom. She felt as one buried among ruined hopes and fallen ambitions. She was almost swooning with terror and vexation.

"It can't be as bad as that," she returned. "I will see Pam at once. And, Carew dear, if you meet Lord Benbreck, don't be rude to him, and don't say anything of this to your father."

War in the Camp

"Very good, mother," Carew responded. "I won't. Only, as you must see, this sort of thing can't go on."

She found Pamela still in a flaming indignation, and was artfully if tearfully soothing.

"Lord Benbreck didn't mean to offend you, Pam," she cooed. "I'm sure of that. He's devoted to you, simply devoted. But evidently, for reasons with which we have nothing to do, he can't endure Mr. Chisholm. And your father has invited Mr. Chisholm back. He musn't come. It would be ruinous."

"I have asked him, too, mother," Pamela responded.

"Before Lord Benbreck?"

"Yes, mother, before Lord Benbreck. Why not? Are we to order our lives to suit him?" Mrs. Fairhurst wrung her hands in anguish.

"What made you do it?" she cried out, in accents of tragedy. "You knew they were enemies."

"I knew that Lord Benbreck hates Mr. Chisholm."

"And yet in his presence you invite Mr. Chisholm back. Don't you see what that must mean? Pam, Pam, where was your judgment? What were you thinking of, anyway?"

"I was thinking of fair play and justice. Mr. Chisholm has been grossly insulted."

Mrs. Fairhurst seemed to be wrenching the jewels from her fingers and to care nothing how the fingers fared in the process.

"Our first duty is to Lord Benbreck," she said; "he is our guest and more to us than a score of Chisholms. You ought to remember that, Pam." She looked at her daughter pointedly. "When your father invited Mr. Chisholm to come back he had no idea how things were, didn't know anything of old family quarrels and all that. You did, and ought to have taken them into account. Mr. Chisholm must not come back here."

Faces in the Mist

"Then to balance things, I suppose Lord Benbreck is to go," rejoined Pamela.

"Go!" echoed Mrs. Fairhurst, ready to cry with chagrin. "Go! Have you lost your senses, Pam, or what has come over you?"

"Listen, mother," was the response. "At Bruan Lord Benbreck and Mr. Chisholm quarrelled."

"You never told me, Pam," her mother complained.

"You never told me. If you had, this wouldn't have happened."

"I didn't want to worry you, mother. But they quarrelled, and I saw just enough to make me think Mr. Chisholm was the offender. Lord Benbreck did his best to confirm that impression. I didn't blame him, much, because we are naturally disposed, more or less, to misrepresent those we dislike. I was rude and unjust to Mr. Chisholm, gave his enemy a chance to gloat over him. In consequence he left wounded and disgraced. You may remember his hasty departure."

"And you let the thing get on your conscience, Pam. It doesn't pay. In matters of this kind it doesn't pay at all."

"I like to be fair, mother. By-and-by I found out my mistake, but had no chance to correct it. The opportunity came only to-night. Mr. Chisholm once more showed himself a gentleman, whereas Lord Benbreck——"

"It's all the fault of those miserable old quarrels," Mrs. Fairhurst struck in desperately. "What, what on earth have we to do with them?"

"Nothing much, perhaps. But we have to think of our own feelings a little, and yet more of our honour. I am my father's daughter and yours—yours, mother, and I wouldn't have either of you slighted, not for ten or ten dozen of the best lords in Europe. Benbreck behaved abominably."

War in the Camp

Mrs. Fairhurst's jewelled fingers were again twining like snakes in agony. It seemed that the solid foundations of the world were knocked from under her feet, that the end of everything had come in one devastating crash which left her maimed and helpless amid the universal ruin. All that she had so strenuously worked for, lying awake to devise plans while others slept, all that she had so ardently dreamed and pictured, was brought to naught at a single stroke, and by whom? By Pamela, the centre of hope, the very object and instrument of glory. Was ever such a ghastly calamity, such fiendish irony? But presently, out of the very depth and extremity of her terror, Mrs. Fairhurst began to pluck heart.

"The two must not meet again here, anyway," she repeated, decisively.

"Unless Benbreck goes or hides himself I don't see how a meeting is to be avoided," returned Pamela.

"You worry me, Pam," rejoined her mother. "Of course it can be avoided, and must be avoided; must, you understand. I won't have Lord Benbreck upset."

"Very well, mother. But how do you propose to deal with him, seeing Mr. Chisholm is coming?"

"I tell you Mr. Chisholm mustn't come," cried Mrs. Fairhurst, beside herself with vexation. "I will speak to your father and ask him to countermand the invitation."

"On what ground, mother?"

"On what ground? Pam, you do try me, you really do! It will be enough, I guess, if he says it's inconvenient."

"Quite enough," Pamela agreed promptly. "You have only to hint that, and Mr. Chisholm will certainly not trouble you. But please remember that I, too, have invited him."

"Seems to me," said Mrs. Fairhurst, exasperated

Faces in the Mist

beyond endurance, "you want Mr. Chisholm to come, no matter what happens to Lord Benbreck."

"I want to make amends for a big wrong if I can; and I confess I like a gentleman."

"Do you mean to imply that Lord Benbreck is not a gentleman, then?" Mrs. Fairhurst demanded.

"You know how he has acted, mother."

"Shucks," exclaimed Mrs. Fairhurst, reverting to the vernacular of her youth. "Shucks, you're getting too absurd for anything, Pam, you really are. Don't you see that the Nobility have their own way of looking at things, and are not to be judged like ordinary people."

"Like us, for example," observed Pamela.

"Pam," retorted her mother, fairly losing all patience, "are you resolved to be perverse, or have you lost your head? You know perfectly well what I mean. If Lord Benbreck is different in some ways from the people we have been used to, we must put up with it, that's all."

"Because he is a lord, mother?" inquired Pamela. She was warming to the subject, a fervid love of right, and an equally fervid hatred of wrong and snobbery giving her courage. Mrs. Fairhurst looked at her ruefully, and then in the horror-stricken tones of one who makes a horrible discovery, she cried: "I do believe, Pam, you would rather have Mr. Chisholm than Lord Benbreck, I do believe you would." Treason and heresy could not go beyond that. Neither could the crassest folly.

Pamela crimsoned to the eyes, but answered heroically: "Things of this sort do not tend to send Lord Benbreck up in one's estimation."

"Then you *do* like Mr. Chisholm best," said Mrs. Fairhurst. A cold sensation of disaster passed through her, followed swift and hot by a stinging sense of grievance and ingratitude.

War in the Camp

For whom was all the scheming? For Pamela. Who, if things went well, would enjoy the coronet that dangled and glittered in the distance? Pamela. She must be saved from her own folly and infatuation. She was meant for great things, and great things she should have in spite of herself. To that end Chisholm must be forbidden the house, blotted out of the list of friends. No squeamish fantastic notion of right or wrong, meanness or honour, must be allowed to interfere with the grand scheme of ambition, the glorious dream of half a life-time.

Leaving Pamela in ignorance of her intention, Mrs. Fairhurst flew to her husband, and had the luck to find him alone, smoking serenely. Sweeping in upon him like a miniature tornado, like a tornado she came to her point.

"Rube," she said, consternation and rebuke almost equally blended in voice and mien, "you have invited Chisholm here to-morrow."

Mr. Fairhurst leaned forward in his chair, fanning away the cloud of fragrant smoke to see her more clearly.

"Yes," he answered, "I have invited Chisholm for to-morrow."

"Then he mustn't come," she declared vehemently; "he mustn't come."

"Why, Susannah? You look as if the bottom had been knocked out of creation. What's up?"

"I have discovered something—something dreadful, Rube. Chisholm mustn't come—he really mustn't."

"Tell me why, Susannah. What's the matter with him?"

"Did you know," returned his wife, "that the Dundallochs and the Chisholms have been enemies for ever so long—generations and generations, I reckon?"

"No, I didn't," Mr. Fairhurst replied, leaning a little further forward.

Faces in the Mist

"They have, though, bitter and implacable enemies. Would cut each other's throats if they got the chance. At Bruan, it seems, Lord Benbreck and young Chisholm fell out, and now when they meet here they're at their quarrelling again. Lord Benbreck is our guest and must be protected. You'll cancel the invitation to Chisholm?"

Mr. Fairhurst sat bolt upright.

"A feud, eh?" he said. "That's gay." The unregenerate man in him was afire with interest.

"Yes, a feud of the worst kind," returned Mrs. Fairhurst. "So, you see, they must not come together here. Besides, Pam's gone and got mixed up in it. It makes me sick to think of it all."

"Pam mixed up in it!" repeated Mr. Fairhurst. "How did she manage that? Where and how does she come in?"

"Pam," replied Mrs. Fairhurst, in the bitterness of disappointment—"Pam has been making a pretty considerable and not very creditable kind of a fool of herself."

"First time she's done it that I know of," remarked Mr. Fairhurst. "What's she been doing?"

Mrs. Fairhurst scarcely had words for the enormity, but she did her best, struggling the while with a hot and righteous indignation.

"Taking sides 'against Lord Benbreck,'" she told her husband. "Seems that over the wretched Bruan quarrel she blamed Chisholm. Then she repented."

"And the repentance was pretty bad, I reckon," observed Mr. Fairhurst. "That's like Pam. Go on, Susannah."

"Yes," his wife agreed, "the repentance is bad enough to be downright absurd and outrageous. Conscience troubled her so much that nothing would do her but to go and ask Chisholm's pardon."

War in the Camp

"If she felt guilty, she'd do that all right. Well?"

"And that's not the worst of it. Not content with apologising herself, she'd have Lord Benbreck do the same, and shake hands to the bargain. Naturally, he wouldn't."

"Too much for a lord, I reckon. Well?"

"Pam considers herself insulted by his refusal, thinks Chisholm is badly treated, and all that. Did you ever hear such rubbish?" Mr. Fairhurst gave his cigar a quick twist between his teeth, as his way was when thinking hard.

"Look here, Susannah," he said, disregarding the question. "Reckon Pam has her reasons for acting as she did. I'll send for her."

"Don't do that, Rube," his wife cried in a fresh access of horror. "Don't do that."

"Why?"

"Because she's silly. Because her head is full of preposterous notions."

"Depends on the notions whether they're preposterous or she's silly, Susannah. As a general thing Pam's pretty level-headed—pretty level-headed. So far as I've seen I'd be disposed to bet on her good sense every time."

"But you'll cancel the invitation to Chisholm?" his wife implored, holding with feminine pertinacity to her main point. "He must not come here making more trouble—he simply must not."

"Doesn't have to make it," was the response. "Appears to find it ready-made and waiting for him. But we'll see what Pam has to say. Give everybody a chance; that's good doctrine, I reckon. Anyway, it's the doctrine I'd like others to apply to me when I'm in a fix."

"Rube," retorted Mrs. Fairhurst, provoked to distraction by what she thought treason and blind folly. "We've got to decide between Lord Benbreck

Faces in the Mist

and Mr. Chisholm. That's what we've got to do, right now; and I hope there isn't any doubt what the decision will be." Mr. Fairhurst pulled at his cigar thoughtfully.

"This war in the camp needs thinking over, Susannah," he replied. "As you say, we've got to decide a pretty big question. We've got to put two men in the scales and weigh 'em, that's about what we've got to do."

Mrs. Fairhurst bit her lip. That there should be any hesitation, any doubt as to the course of action, that Chisholm should for a single instant be set against Lord Benbreck, filled her first with dread and then with a choking wrath.

"Rube," she said, hotly, "you'll make me sorry I ever set eyes on that man Chisholm, you will; in fact, I'm sorry now."

"Don't you take on like that, Susannah," was the placid response. "Chisholm's a mighty good fellow, if I know anything, and I've had something to do with men in my time. To be sure, he hasn't got a title, and he's not a millionaire, I reckon. But I haven't got a title either, and before I had my pile I had to make it. So there's hope for Chisholm. Besides, we haven't heard Pam on the matter yet."

"Pam!" cried Mrs. Fairhurst in the anguish of disgust. "You needn't go to Pam. I don't know what's come over her. Why I verily believe she'd rather have Chisholm than Lord Benbreck, I verily believe she would. What do you think of that?"

"I'm trying to find out, Susannah. And since I'm not to question Pam I'd better see Chisholm. So I guess we'll just let him come along as arranged. There's no valid reason for shutting the door in his face that I can see."

Mrs. Fairhurst stared gasping, then shuddered to the soles of her boots. Was he, too, going back on her? Was he, too, going mad?

CHAPTER XIV

MRS. FAIRHURST DISTRACTED

MRS. FAIRHURST had still one resource which in extremity was worth all the rest—herself. Of herself, therefore, she took counsel, spending half the night in sleepless agitation. The morning found her a trifle jaded, but composed, cheery, and resolute. She wasted neither time nor energy in vain laments and upbraidings. That was not her way. Repining never yet set a wheel in motion, and here was the most urgent need for action.

Immediately after breakfast she contrived to have a word in private with Lord Benbreck, delicately alluded to certain incidents which greatly displeased her, and having thus adroitly broken the ice, bravely went forward, all her charm and finesse in full play. Others from whom she might have expected better were failing her. Of Benbreck she must make sure. He was her big card, and must be played with her utmost skill.

It is well for the peace of the world and the reputation of ambassadors and politicians that women are not yet officially admitted to the ranks of diplomacy. Mrs. Fairhurst in the inner councils of Europe would have made peace or war according to her pleasure or whim. Never was such another adept in the high art of persuasion. She would have shamed the honeysweet Nestor with speech sweeter, more subtly alluring than his own; shown the wily Odysseus how to present a case or confound an opponent, and fired

Faces in the Mist

the envy of him who first taught mankind how to make the worse appear the better cause.

At the end of fifteen minutes she was once more smiling in triumph; Benbreck was hers. He told her so, giving his hand on the compact. The victory was not easy, for his pride was lacerated and his hatred of Chisholm fierce. Nevertheless she prevailed. Had she not been blinded by the dazzle of her own excessive cleverness, the ease of the victory might have roused her suspicions. No wise man quarrels with gold. So Benbreck, remembering his need, charmed his hostess by allowing her to imagine she had completely conquered. He, too, had a high card to play. And not only did he gratify her by this gallant compliance with her wishes, but showed a chivalrous concern to make things right with Pamela.

"Sorry if I seemed rude last night," he said, brimming over with contrition. As he looked what he said, Pamela instantly forgave, her very quickness in resentment making her all the readier in forgiveness.

When the great feat was accomplished, Mrs. Fairhurst secretly called her husband to behold the reconciled lovers together in a bower of vines by a gushing stream.

"Made up, you see," she remarked, joyously. "Just see them, happy as cooing doves. You needn't cancel your invitation. Chisholm may come." Mr. Fairhurst opened his eyes, but was glad to be persuaded of peace.

"That's all right," he said. "Been talking to Benbreck?"

"Making things easy for him, that's all. And as soon as he got the chance he went straight and made it up with Pam."

"Glad he had the gumption to do that. I don't take any stock in a man who can't apologise."

Carew was told that Benbreck had honourably

Mrs. Fairhurst Distracted

made amends, and was satisfied, pending observations on his own account.

So Kenneth came, cheerfully casting the past and all its complications and misunderstandings behind him. At the last parting Pamela's eyes gave assurance that would have sufficed for a far feebleness than his. Benbreck's attitude was fastidiously correct—that is to say, well-bred to the point of frigidity. "We cannot, of course, embrace," it seemed to say. "But I am willing we should try to tolerate each other for the time being. Here in Damascus there is novelty enough to entertain us without the pursuit of private feuds so far from home." And Kenneth was content to fall in with that humour. "No need to vex or embarrass others with our quarrels," he thought. "We can bide our time." Providently nursing vengeance, you see, for a more convenient season.

In this condition of armed neutrality they met, associated, played the parts of gentlemen. But "Fire that's closest kept burns most of all." Their hatred lost nothing by being hidden under a smooth surface, though Mrs. Fairhurst, misinterpreting that smoothness, plumed herself on a lasting victory. And through it all she kept a watchful, an extremely watchful, eye on Pamela.

Pamela, indeed, was the problem. Her capriciousness returned in an aggravated form. She had an insatiable appetite for adventure, usually of the wrong kind. Worse still, her bearing towards Benbreck, when Chisholm happened to be present, caused her mother fresh uneasiness. One day, ignoring the dragoman, she shut her guide-book with a snap and sought the aid of Kenneth.

"It's mechanical and already out of date," she said, rejecting the volume. "You know everything and everybody. Will you take us round?"

Faces in the Mist

There were difficulties of an official kind in the way. For two days the thing was in suspense, and Pamela was on the rack. When Kenneth announced that he had succeeded in satisfying the jealous powers, the radiance of her face made her mother shiver. Benbreck, who was neither blind nor a fool, was also clearly hurt by this too open delight. For one hot moment, indeed, rebellion seethed in his breast. Chisholm for guide, counsellor, and friend! Chisholm for constant companion! Intolerable!

Mrs. Fairhurst, perceiving the danger, promptly administered a dose of her best soothing syrup, and the fit passed; not because of the medicine, but because Benbreck had once more a timely remembrance of duty.

"The million, the million! Don't forget the million! Never mind petty obstacles." So the warning sounded in his ears. And he obeyed. After all, they laugh who win, and he was not to be ousted, not to be thrust aside by any interloper, least of all by a Chisholm. You observe here a new element beginning to ferment. Without knowing it, without so much as a suspicion of the fact, Benbreck was spurring in headlong rivalry. Anything might happen, and, in truth, dramatic and far-reaching events were at hand.

As if infatuated, Pamela began to see through the eyes of the new guide. All things took on the colour of his words and sentiments—mosques, tombs, gardens, this incident and that plucked out of the faded past. He had the secret of fascination, of inspiration. History, tradition, legend, quickened by the magic of imagination, gave up their dead. Dim, half-mythical heroes walked the earth again, bustling in all their ancient glory. Vanished, far-off centuries leaped back to life, making her a sharer in their picturesque turmoil. Again armed caravans and trampling, embattled hosts filed forth along the ancient

Mrs. Fairhurst Distracted

highways of travel or traffic—to Aleppo, by Baalbek to Tripoli, across the Lebanons to Tyre and Sidon; over the Jordan, by Tabor and Esdraelon, to Megiddo, Philistia, and Egypt; south to Jericho, up the vale of Jezreel, out on Sharon's Plain, to Palmyra and Bagdad—wondrous processions, tempting danger and defying it, fighting, slaying, always and everywhere making the pulses beat and the heart thrill.

She supped on romance. The very names, recaptured as it were out of the golden mists of childhood, sang themselves like a strain of mystic music in her head. Now, too, she understood Damascus, and how it came to be the centre, the pivot, the emporium of a world. All roads converged here, bringing great kings or their captains, and all who came were captivated by the soft beauty of the green jewel set in the midst of an iron barrenness. Little wonder that the children of the deserts, escaped for a little from torrid wastes, made its bowery gardens and cool, limpid streams the ideal of their paradise. "Splendid!" cried Pamela. "Splendid! I see all the past trooping up, making the oldest history like a tale of yesterday. The place is almost as old as time itself."

It breathed enchantment, stirred like an antique tale of chivalry. Nor were the Davids and the Saladins, the caravans and the bannered armies, alone remembered. In the *Via Recta*, the street called Straight, unawed by swarming dogs and gaping passengers, she fairly danced in the footsteps of St. Paul, saw him in his basket dropped from the window by the wall and make off, a good runner, lest the jealous Aratas should clap him in gaol as a renegade and religious incendiary. Then the spirit of adventure, running high, began to press beyond the Damascus gates.

"Won't you introduce us to some of your picturesque

Faces in the Mist

native friends whom we admire riding into town?" Pamela asked Kenneth. "It would be delightful to call on them."

So, in spite of vehement and troubled protests from Mrs. Fairhurst, they went forth, lured by the glamour of romance. Every region had its peculiar story or legend. Thus but a mile or so north was the spot where Elijah anointed Hazael King of Syria for the scourging of the Baal worshippers of Israel, and hard by Abraham fell on Chedorlaomer, King of Elam, and his princely bandits, for spoiling Sodom and carrying off Lot.

"Makes one get up one's Bible history, doesn't it?" Carew remarked, and proved by his ardour that the task was wholly delightful.

At Salahiye they exchanged depressed Jewish Moslems for Kurds, fierce-eyed and armed to the teeth. Mrs. Fairhurst shuddered as she looked at them. But the Turkish soldiers saluted Chisholm Bey, and whom the soldiers saluted the Kurds treated with respect. The party were welcomed by sheiks with all the impressive dignity, if not quite the glory, of Solomon. They entered black tents, partook of salt and drank coffee, squatted, now on carpets of priceless value, now on bits of sackcloth or rough matting, with the scuttled harem peeping at them from the darkness beyond. Pamela pitied the women, frankly admired many of the men, and enjoyed everything, while her mother trembled in acute misery. The more, indeed, Mrs. Fairhurst ventured, the more she dreaded and distrusted. Carew tried to comfort her.

"It's all right, mother," he told her. "The fiercest of these people wouldn't touch Chisholm Bey's friends, you bet."

And, in truth, savage chiefs, bristling and glittering with steel, amply confirmed the assurance. On all

Mrs. Fairhurst Distracted

hands it was proved that Chishoim Bey was a man to make friends with. Had he not the ear of Constantinople? Was he not one of the makers of the Sacred Railway, that wonder of wonders which clove its way through rock and sand straight to the Holy City? Pamela noted all this and made the most of it. Hence from the sand and boulders of the desert she lifted longing eyes to Jabel-esh-Sheikh, known to the Western world as Great Hermon, stretching like a vast serrated wall of snow along the western horizon. But when a little experimental mountaineering was suggested Kenneth shook his head.

"They climb mountains in Switzerland," Pamela told him. "Why not in Syria?"

"Syria is not yet laid out as a playground," he answered her, smiling. "Among some mountains there are more dangers than avalanches and crevasses. In the recesses of Hermon we might come across gentlemen who would laugh even at the power and authority of Constantinople."

"Bedouins," cried Pamela. "We could go armed."

"And come back dead," interjected her mother. "Pam, you make my flesh creep—you really do." And then added emphatically, "I am not going to have any more of it. We'll pack and go home if this sort of thing continues. I guess it's about time, anyway."

She had other reasons than fear of Bedouins. It was obvious, though Pamela insisted in ignoring the fact, that Benbreck bitterly disliked the proceedings. Benbreck, in truth, trotted after Pamela in a smother of resentment. But for his father's unforgettable injunction he would have wheeled about and gone home, declining both the treatment and the rivalry that was thrust upon him. Being sworn to win, however, he threw all his influence on the side of Mrs. Fairhurst. Hermon had, therefore, to

Faces in the Mist

be admired from afar, and henceforth even the black tents were tabooed.

Mrs. Fairhurst was, in fact, congratulating herself on another victory when a new bomb exploded at her feet. One evening, as she was breathing softly over follies suppressed, Carew bounded into the domestic circle, irrepressibly excited.

"Pam, Pam!" he cried, in wild glee. "Chisholm has managed it." A vivid joy leaped to Pamela's face, but it was Mrs. Fairhurst who responded.

"Managed it?" she repeated, a sudden premonition of evil at her heart. "Managed what?"

Thereupon Carew was obliged to explain that, in virtue of high favour with the governing powers, Chisholm had procured an official invitation for them all to be his guests in a run over the Sacred Railway.

"What?" cried Mrs. Fairhurst, "down through the desert among all the savage tribes? They'd cut our throats, they would. What do you think, Lord Benbreck?" she asked, turning to him for support. Her eyes said beseechingly, "Support me. This is your cause as well as mine." Screwing his eyeglass a little tighter in its place, Benbreck agreed that if they got the chance the desert tribes were very likely to do as Mrs. Fairhurst feared.

"Besides," he added, "it would be bad form for unaccredited strangers to intrude upon the sacred privacies of the Moslem; might give rise to international complications."

Pamela flashed her reply with evident glee.

"If we are invited officially, how can we be unaccredited strangers?" she asked, sweetly.

"You don't understand," retorted Mrs. Fairhurst, and appealed to her husband for an immediate negative. But he, too, was bitten by folly.

"Let's be invited before we refuse," he replied.

Mrs. Fairhurst Distracted

"Guess Chisholm knows what he's doing, but we'll see."

When, presently, Kenneth arrived in person with the invitation, Mr. Fairhurst asked, "What does it mean exactly—just a trip down the line and a general look round, eh?"

"And perhaps your opinion of the Hedjaz Railway," responded Kenneth, "first as a piece of engineering, and next as an instance of the sagacity of the Turk."

"I am interested," said Mr. Fairhurst. "If you ask me what's been back of most revolutions during the last three-quarters of a century I answer 'railways.' This one is as much strategic as religious, I reckon. They're not always as sleepy at Constantinople as they pretend. Yes, I'd like to see the Hedjaz Railway."

That decided it; but for consolation Mrs. Fairhurst told Benbreck privately, "When this is over we'll turn and make for home. You may take my word for that. But I hope you'll enjoy the run."

"Oh, perhaps," returned Benbreck, doubtfully. "Perhaps."

On the great day the party were early afoot. Morning prayers were just over and the faithful were flocking from the mosques—a variegated throng, blithe and clamorous as boys released from school. At the citadel a military band struck up the Hamidieh March, and presently a troop of cavalry clattered by, its accoutrements glancing in the level sun, its pennons streaming bravely in the fresh breeze. The Sublime Porte, oily, lethargic, evasive, believes, nevertheless, in impressing distant adherents with the length of his arm and its power to strike in case of need. That inspires a wholesome respect. The bazaars were not yet open, but the low-browed arches were as full of people as the streets.

The movements of the Fairhurst party excited a keen—indeed, what might appear an inordinate—

Faces in the Mist

interest. People not only stared at them in passing, but turned to gaze after them, whispering and gesticulating. Near the station—that is to say, the Gate of Allah, the immemorial starting-place of the pilgrimage—the crowd thickened, in obvious, if suppressed, excitement. As Chisholm Bey, who was awaiting their arrival, stepped forward to greet his guests, a rippling hum ran through the restless multitude. The outing was a strictly private enterprise—privately sanctioned as a tribute to Chisholm. But someone had leaked. The secret was out, and here was a simmering crowd come to see a company of Nazarenes—the first of their kind—go forth upon the Sacred Railway. What did it mean? How far did they intend to go? To Maan only, where strangers might be tolerated, or had they the presumption of desiring to set eyes on the Holy City itself? That were a sacrilege hardly to be forgiven, even if the Sultan sanctioned and the Grand Mufti approved and blessed.

The excited spectators were, in fact, witnessing an event wholly new, wholly unprecedented in the history of Islam. The man from the West, the miracle worker, the wizard of science who made the very rocks and sands obey his will, brought many puzzles besides the locomotive, and here was one of the biggest. The sight of Chisholm Bey moved some of the onlookers to applause, but most were watchfully silent as he introduced the strangers, Western fashion, to a few of his particular friends come to see them off. His chief, the German engineer, ran a critical eye over the throng, and remarked to Chisholm confidentially: "You will be varyy caireful. They are as a charge in the rock with the fuse set, reaty to explote." Chisholm nodded, smiling.

"Wish they had stayed at home," he said. "But I won't forget."

Mrs. Fairhurst Distracted

Mrs. Fairhurst, whose ears were sharpened by apprehension, anxiously inquired of the German engineer if there was any danger. Even at the eleventh hour she yearned for an excuse to stop this insane adventure. He bestowed upon her a big, broad, benevolent Teutonic smile.

"Ach," was the response. "Are they not joost children? What then? Dreat them as children, what you call humour them. They are matt with religion, what you call fanateeks. When I wanted to go to Medina on business what happened? I had to go by stealth and in the dark, without sun or moon or stars shining. Ach, it will be different in ten years." He grinned intelligently.

"You mean, Pasha, we'd better be careful not to run against their prejudices and superstitions?"

"Matam unterstants," was the courtly response. Then he added, with a smiling glance at Kenneth, "You haf a goot guite, a very goot guite. Cheeseholm Bey, they loaf him like a broder. Ach, you shoot see them when he makes museek on the bagbibes. All Tamascus turns out for to hear him."

"Piper, by Jiminy!" cried Carew. "That's unexpected."

"A mere relic of Highland barbarism," laughed Kenneth. "These people are amused and interested because the pipes originally came from the East. Sort of prehistoric reversion, you see."

As the party entered their carriage the German engineer went forward and said something to the driver in the tongue that is familiar on the Rhine. Then he returned, smiling his spacious Teutonic smile.

"Goot luck to you," he said in a voice that all might hear. "The treep will be Ar." Then in a guarded whisper to Kenneth: "If anything happens, if you are in a feex, you understand, wire to me at once; I will coom. There now," he went on aloud, as the engine

Faces in the Mist

shrieked and the train began to move off. "Off you go Haj, a peelgrimage all on your own hook." He raised his helmet, smiling benignly until the last head was withdrawn from the carriage window. Then he turned and spoke to the crowd in Arabic, which was better, on the whole, than his English.

"Who is the man ye delight to honour?" he said, as if taking good-will for granted. "Who but Chisholm Bey? And surely ye do well, for he is worthy. Besides, is he not a friend of the Great Sultan?"

There was a moment's deep silence and a quick flashing of black eyes to and fro. Then a rough voice asked:

"Wherefore takes he Nazarenes out upon the Sacred Railway? Is it not for the Faithful alone?"

"For the Faithful surely," he agreed. "Yet is there a purpose above all purposes. Whose will say ye is to be obeyed?"

"The Prophet's, the Prophet's!" came in a resounding shout from half a thousand throats.

"Ye answer truly and well," beamed the German engineer. "And doth not the Prophet use all men and all things for his own high purposes? Wherefore, think ye, has he brought Chisholm Bey and your servant who speaks hither?"

"To serve him that all men might know his power and be bent to his will," came the response.

"The truth cannot be denied," said the German engineer. "Ye are great, ye are favoured; ye beckon, and lo! from the ends of the earth there come to you ministers and servants. Go home, my children; be wise and give thanks, for great and manifold are your blessings."

They gave a shout and began to troop off. When they were gone the German engineer remarked to a friend in his native tongue: "They are ugly; I like

Mrs. Fairhurst Distracted

not their looks. It will be known all down the line that Chisholm is coming with a company of Nazarenes, and that will mean more than religion. I wish he was back. What has he to do with idle globe-trotters?"

"The girl is lovely," observed the other with a grin.

"Ach, you have hit it," said the German engineer, grinning in turn. "The girl is lovely, very lovely; and rich, they tell me. Chisholm's always in luck. It's not of engineering he's thinking this day. Come along; let's drink to him in good lager."

CHAPTER XV

ARCADIANS OF THE DESERT

THE cool green luxuriance of Damascus was immediately exchanged for the baked, stony waste of the Wady El Ajan as the train headed for a gap in the indented hills that enclose the city on the south. Behind, the white houses, half veiled by embowering greenery, sank, as though disappearing into the earth; the minarets tapered to needle points, and presently a sweeping curve at the entrance to a gorge of the Jabel-el-Aswad suddenly cut off from view even the towering crests of Hermon. In the same moment the engine shrieked; almost simultaneously there was a furious clanging of metals and echoing of rocks, and next minute the train shot forth from the gorge upon the Hauran plain, once a granary of the ubiquitous Roman. Then Hermon, slowly lifting his triple crown behind, resumed his sovereignty as undisputed lord of the landscape.

Down the broad, fertile vale of the Hauran the party went, every sense alive, though not in each case with similar feelings. Pamela, who was primarily responsible for the expedition, throbbed to the marrow with the half-fearful, wholly delicious excitement of one plunging into something wild, romantic, and unknown. Carew's pulses beat as strongly, if under a tighter rein. Mr. Fairhurst took the experience in the equable, pleasurable spirit of commercial enterprise. Mrs. Fairhurst's feelings were neither equable nor pleasurable, but secretly resentful, as of one outwitted

Arcadians of the Desert

and trapped. As for Benbreck, his lordly calm most worthily upheld the reputation of the British Peerage for nonchalance. His aspect, indeed, was as sublimely unconcerned as if he were sauntering down Piccadilly, with no more serious intent than the killing of a tedious interval of time. Though resenting the excursion even more hotly than Mrs. Fairhurst, he was nevertheless prepared to endure stoically for the sake of the erratic and elusive Pamela.

Kenneth, too, was perfectly cool, and at the same time perfectly alert and wary. If anything happened to his charges, Europe, Asia, and America would ring with the sensation; and to be the cause of an international affair of the wrong kind is not merely to incur curses in many languages, but to jeopardise a tangle of private and public interests. Not, perhaps, till his chief spoke words of caution in his ear did he realise what it was to have an American millionaire with his wife and family *plus* a British lord on one's mind. Down the line were wild tribes as yet utterly contemptuous of drawing-room etiquette and the laws of politeness to strangers. Kenneth knew them to a nicety, taught by many a raid, many a felony, and not a few picturesque and dramatic murders.

To the chief among his guests the expedition had a double enchantment—strangeness of scene and haunting familiarity of name and tradition. Thus, on quitting the Hauran, Kenneth told them they were traversing the once famed kingdom of Og, otherwise the land of Bashan.

"Which is to say, the land of oaks, fatlings, and lowing kine," observed Pamela, aptly recalling Scripture lessons. "Where are they?"

"Among the things that were, even like Og the mighty," Kenneth answered. "These have taken their place." And he pointed to a straggling herd of camels.

Faces in the Mist

"With genuine Bedouins shepherding them, too," cried Carew. "I guess this is the East all right. Oh, yes, I guess it is, in spite of American steel rails, German engineers, and Belgian rolling stock. Reckon old Og would have his eyes prized pretty wide open if he saw this jaunt through his country."

While still full of Og and his exploits they were informed that if human vision could pierce a narrow range of hills to the west they would behold the blue waters of the Sea of Galilee; and soon afterwards there arose the excited cry of "The Jordan, the Jordan."

They went clanging down by a series of rock cuttings, tunnels, and viaducts, which as an engineering feat stirred the admiration of Mr. Fairhurst.

"We had pretty well all the nations of the earth working at these," Kenneth explained. "But for the most difficult parts we had to import European workmen."

"Bully for civilisation," said Carew. "Appears to come in handy even in the wilderness."

Hard by the Sea of Galilee they crossed the Jordan Valley, full of reminiscence of warrior and sage—Joshua, Saul, David, Elijah, Elisha. Presently they left the last cornfield and swept into the vast bleak solitudes of Arabia Petra, keeping close to the ancient pilgrim route, marked everywhere by disused stone cisterns and reservoirs. The breath of the desert met them as with a salutation of liberty.

"Farewell convention and the tinsel called civilisation," it seemed to say. "An immemorial freedom greets you. Forward, my children, forward!"

They began, too, to make the acquaintance of the unspoiled children of Nature that have so long enjoyed this liberty. At stopping-places, which for purposes of observation were frequent, they were overwhelmed with attentions. Men of venerable and reverend aspect saluted Kenneth Bey ceremoniously, made

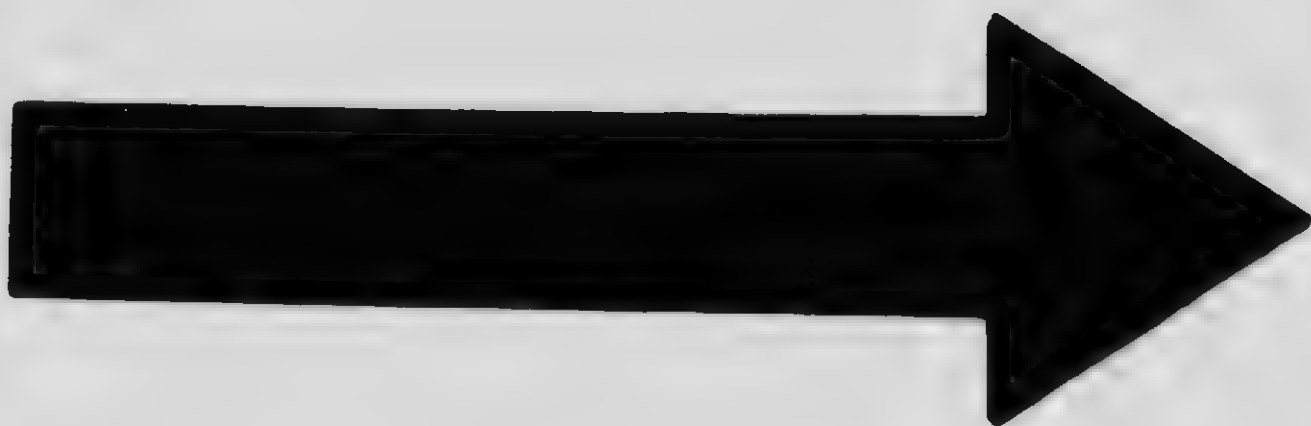
Arcadians of the Desert

speeches on his shining merits, invoked blessings on himself and all his friends present and absent. Kenneth made suitable acknowledgment in coin, whereupon, with more salaams and blessings, he was assured of the felicities of Paradise. At the strangers the gaunt, picturesque crowds gazed with narrow, slit-like eyes out of a network of wrinkles. Pamela, remarking this facial peculiarity, was informed it was the infallible mark of the desert-born.

"It results from the constant contraction of the lids to temper the blaze of the sun," Kenneth explained to her. "The farther you go the more wrinkles you will find."

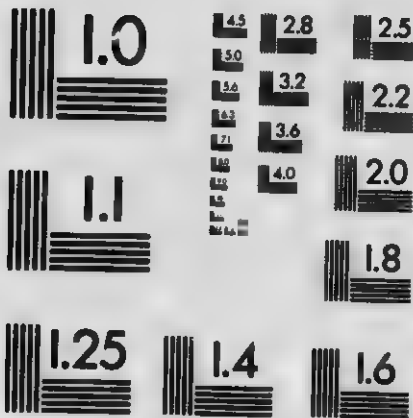
Though carrying curiosity far beyond the bounds of good manners, the gazers appeared to be unfeignedly friendly. A multitude of marvellous things had lately come to engage their interest, and one of the greatest of marvels was the fire-fed demon that tore its gleaming way through the blistering desert places where men dropped sunstruck, and camels, created to bear heat and thirst, lay down to have their bones picked by carrion birds. And lo! the fire fiend was bringing people from far lands, alien of look and speech, but fitting into the subtle Arab's game of life like a gift of the Holy Prophet.

The permanent way being as yet unfit for express traffic, the train proceeded at a pace which enabled well-mounted Bedouins to gallop alongside here and there, shouting as for battle, brandishing spears, exhibiting the perfection of Arab horsemanship. Well knowing the motives of the performers, Chisholm Bey expressed his appreciation in a tangible manner, and again was blessed by lips little used to benedictions. Observing the frequent passing of coin, Mr. Fairhurst begged to be allowed to contribute his quota, and in the teeth of an adverse judgment Kenneth assented. Now anywhere along the route of the



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Faces in the Mist

Sacred Railway a moderate distribution of buck-sheesh is a policy of wisdom, but an extravagance suggesting excessive wealth is a folly that tempts to unholy deeds. The simple children of Nature received the benefactions of the travelling millionaire with a surprised joy that made their black eyes sparkle significantly and their tongues wax eloquent.

"Allah increase thy store, O shining one." "May thy barns be full to bursting, and thy cellars overflow." "Mayest thou drink for ever of rivers of butter." Kenneth translated the blessings and good wishes gravely.

But no sooner was the benefactor's back turned than those who blessed with such unction were whispering craftily, and presently found occasion to speak aloud.

"Behold," they said, "behold the fiend of smoke and flame comes bringing men of great possessions. Not for nothing are they sent hither. What think ye?"

What they thought was succinctly expressed with grins and gleaming avarice. Nazarenes, unbelievers, committing sacrilege on the Sacred Railway—what could it mean but that they were delivered by the Prophet for a spoil? Verily it must be so. There was fierce smacking of lips. But there was need of caution.

"Be wary," said the simple Arcadians; "yea, see everything and be as seeing nothing."

The cue was, in fact, to watch, pray, and keep one's powder dry. The Sultan, it had to be remembered, had a long arm that smote with deadly power, and Chisholm Bey was his friend. If only Chisholm Bey were out of the way!

Word of the strangers flew as on the desert wind. Arab courtesy, the finest, subtlest in the world, became embarrassing in its warmth. Heads of tribes, men of importance generally, vied in offering welcome. The

Arcadians of the Desert

name of Chisholm Bey was pronounced with compliments culled from the rarest masters of flattery, the Arab poets; and with it was coupled his beneficent and gracious friend. Kenneth expended vast quantities of poetic language in returning thanks, not omitting, however, to let it be seen he carried effective weapons.

At Maan, some three hundred miles south of Damascus, an odd mixture of mud huts and solid stone houses (being a big *dépôt*), officials, soldiers, petty traders, broken adventurers, and unchanged thieves, the guests were informed they had just reached the border of the land of magic.

"You are standing now," Kenneth remarked, "where the old caravan track plunged into the real desert. There was one main gateway. Maan was one post; Petra of the Rocks, the ancient capital of Edom out there through the Moab hills"—he waved his arm westward—"was the other. Ages before Islam and its pilgrimages were invented, before engineers dreamt of the Suez Canal or the smoke of a steamer darkened the azure of the Red Sea, the Syrian caravans passed this way with their precious freight of gold and frankincense. It is said that a good deal of rare and costly stuff miscarried one time and another just about here."

"Which proves that the people were always enterprising," Carew laughed. "It hasn't much to show now." He looked round the few scraggy date palms, the water cisterns, and, beyond the solid stone structures of the railway, to the primitive huts in the valley below.

"And what's ahead?" Pamela asked, her eyes dancing with eagerness.

"The desert," was the answer. "The real thing, gaunt and merciless. So far we have only sniffed it from a distance. There's some rather wonderful

Faces in the Mist

scenery, too; and if we're in luck perhaps we may get a peep at the Holy City itself."

She clapped her hands, her face glowing joyfully.

"Let's get on, then," she cried. "Now, mother dear," as Mrs. Fairhurst showed the usual signs of dissent, "don't look so distressed. We may never have such a chance again. And Mr. Chisholm will see us through all right."

She turned back to him with a look that made Benbreck scowl under his sun helmet. Kenneth bowed.

"There," said Pamela, cajolingly. "Don't be afraid. None will dare to meddle with the friends of Chisholm Bey." She pronounced the words slowly, as if tasting their relish. "Chisholm Bey," she repeated. "The title acts like magic, I have noticed." And again she smiled with that look which was as a dagger in Benbreck's vitals.

In spite of an apparent geniality and the heat of a tropical sun he was freezing inwardly. It was all Chisholm now—Chisholm Bey, if you please. His lordship's part seemed to be to stand by and admire. That was hard fare to stomach. My lord felt he was serving dearly for the prospective dowry. Did Jacob in his twice seven years of patient serving endure as much?

Benbreck was tempted to throw up the game and thus teach a trenchant lesson to one who had no appreciation of her privileges. There were other girls in the circle of his acquaintance as good as she. "As good," repeated the still small voice. "Possibly. But is there any as rich? What is beauty, what birth, without money?" "Confound this eternal lack of cash!" he said to himself in a spasm of disgust. "How it cripples and constrains one!"

And to think that this light-headed girl, who refused to think seriously even of the British peerage, had

Arcadians of the Desert

the glittering pile that would be worldly salvation to him. And worse still to think she smiled on a Chisholm, a Chisholm of Kinleath.

They went on again by the dread Batn-el-Ghrul, hollow of the genie, where nervous people avouch Satan himself is often to be seen searching and lying in wait for prey, on through the dreary region about Teubuk, lured by a series of magnificent mirages, and so to Darel Hamra, where on the second night they halted dead weary.

They alighted to the humming and simmering of a great throng gathered at word of their approach. Then Abdullah, a local Sheik, in robes that might well have graced Abraham, and a beard of which Aaron might have been proud, stepped forward to receive the illustrious visitors. Personally, he, Abdullah, placed himself and all that was his at their feet. He had a house designed by cunning craftsmen in a far country, brought hither in sections from Acre, and miraculously joined together. Would Chisholm Bey and his never-to-be-sufficiently-appreciated friends deign to occupy it?

Kenneth gratefully acknowledged an invitation not meant to be accepted, and replied that they would content themselves with the place already prepared for them. But to-morrow they would pay their respects and render their thanks more suitably for the proffered hospitality. Abdullah salaamed solemnly and stood aside. Then, through an avenue of turbaned heads, brown faces, and keen eyes, the party passed to their lodging. In London, Paris, or New York the devotee of fashion would not give it a second glance, save perhaps in derision; but in Darel Hamra, after two days of heat, dust, excitement, and prying crowds, it was as a retreat in Eden.

The guests, too weary to be fastidious, dined cheerfully according to local custom, and soon

Faces in the Mist

afterwards were sound asleep. But Kenneth kept awake.

When his guests were balmily unconscious and all was quiet, he stole out. The night was one of clear stars but no moon. Lanterns twinkled here and there round the station, and the electric light shone with a strangely foreign look. On the outskirts wild dogs howled, quarrelling over garbage. Otherwise all was still. He walked quietly on as if taking a breath of air, but suddenly halted, peering into the darkness in front.

"What seek ye, friends?" he inquired in Arabic, speaking softly, as it might appear, into blankness. Immediately three figures detached themselves from the shadow of a house and salaamed. One of them he recognised as the son of Abdullah; the others he guessed were comrades in adventure.

"My father feared evil," was the reply. "And lo! we are come to protect my lord and them that are with him."

"Ye are indeed kind," returned Kenneth, blandly.

"But wherefore feared your father evil?"

"Nay," he was answered, "who knows what may come out of the darkness? Do not perils come upon men like Satan from before and behind, and from the right hand and the left? Can a man defend himself at all points at once? Dangers lurk where we wot not of them."

"Verily thou speakest truth," Kenneth owned, drily. "But go your way; give thanks to your father on my behalf. Say, moreover, that Chisholm Bey, having business on hand, sleeps not. Peace be to all."

The men turned away, salaaming deferentially and cursing in their beards, but immediately the Sheik's son faced back again.

"My father sends a message which I had almost

Arcadians of the Desert

forgot," he said. "What is my lord's pleasure now that he is here at Darel Hamra?"

"Truly his goodness makes me dumb," returned Kenneth. "For this also give him thanks, and say that I will tell him all in the time of audience to-morrow."

"As my lord wills," said the man, and, salaaming once more, disappeared with his companions.

"Checkmate for the present," said Kenneth quietly to himself. "But the game is not over."

CHAPTER XVI

ABDULLAH AND THE HUNDRED SPEARS

NEXT morning he met his friends as cheerful and fresh-eyed as if he had slept sweetly the whole round of the clock. And his guests were no less cheerful, though they had quitted their beds long before their customary time. But it seemed that in that rare atmosphere they could emulate the immortals by dispensing with the mortal condition of sleep. In the crisp desert air their spirits mounted as on wings; they vibrated with an unspeakable feeling of well-being, understood with a new and finer sense the irresistible impulse of the bird to sing and the lamb to skip.

Immediately after breakfast (Arab etiquette being addicted to early hours) Kenneth conducted them to pay their respects to Abdullah, whose foible it was to pose as Lord of the Manor. To omit the ceremonial visit were to affront his very sensitive dignity, and it was no time to incur unnecessary risks. Of the suggestive incident of the previous night Kenneth said nothing, judging silence best where speech might alarm.

Surrounded by a retinue of slaves and retainers, Abdullah received his visitors in the Audience Chamber with the air of an Emperor and the appraising eye of an auctioneer. A multitude of interesting questions pressed for answer in his wily head. How did these strangers stand in their own country? How in the world of international politics? Were

Abdullah and the Hundred Spears

they as rich as reported? In what manner could they be made to yield booty? The presence and friendship of Chisholm Bey complicated matters. One must deal gingerly with a great official of the Sacred Railway, the pet of his Sublime Potency at Constantinople. Oily and elaborate courtesy was, therefore, the cue. Hospitality of the most pressing kind was, of course, obligatory. Enter his door as guest, and the Arab will defend your life with his own; pass thence again, and you are no sooner across the threshold than the hand that defended may cut your throat for a dollar. Suspecting nothing, the strangers found everything novel and interesting. The host tallied exactly with their preconceived notions of the Sheikly character. The fine, old-world demeanour, the benign grace, the deft and gracious compliment, made up, as it seemed, in equal parts of benevolence and poetry, the general fragrance and flavour of a simple and heroic time, were wholly delightful. Here was the true antique, charming in manner, splendidly impressive in jewelled turban and flowing robes. There were Sheiks on view at Damascus, but they were more or less contaminated by civilisation; this enchanting patriarch was still unspoiled. He was fresh from the hand of Nature; took them back at a bound to the far-off youth of the world. What tales they would have to tell to envious friends in London and New York!

The benign Arcadian asked many questions in the benevolent way of friendship.

"Whither goes my lord with these his friends?" he inquired of Kenneth, blandly, at an opportune turn of the palavering. "Go ye backward or forward from hence?"

Kenneth had not studied Oriental, and especially Arab subtlety for five years in vain. Therefore, he answered with convincing innocence: "The desires

Faces in the Mist

of these my friends have not yet been made known to me, O shining one."

Abdullah smiled. "Methinks they have light hearts," he observed, as though referring to the pleasing waywardness of children. "Yet should they think twice and three times ere running into peril. I have heard lately of terrors that make the very marrow freeze in my bones."

"My friends are not afraid," returned Kenneth, simply.

"Nay, but thy race is as a race of lions," said Abdullah, drawing his narrow eyes closer, the better to observe. "It fights man and beast, and is ever victorious; yea, it overcomes the very desert itself, making a safe and smooth way where aforetime there was nought but sand and rocks and thirst, and the bones of them that fell down and died. And, truly, courage is as the sun at noon lighting the path to great deeds. Yet will the wise man take thought of what may be. The time is a time of danger." He lowered his voice expressively. "I hear that in these late days Satan has left Batn-el-Ghrul and the company of the Genii, and has been seen downward towards El Ula."

Kenneth received the announcement with unimpeachable gravity.

"Knows my lord whether the enemy of man works much mischief in his new haunt?" he asked.

Abdullah lifted his eyes heavenward with an expression of awe.

"Nay," he replied, "what tongue can tell the tale of his evil deeds? Men say he lifts a covetous eye on the Holy City itself, even as he coveted Eden on beholding the happiness of Adam."

"The Prophet will foil him there," quoth Kenneth, with all the unction of a good Mussulman. "What shape takes he?"

Abdullah and the Hundred Spears

"All evil shapes, and none long; now a ravening beast, now a thing that smites like lightning out of the darkness or mocks from the whirlwind, and they say he lies in wait for the unprotected."

"His ancient and wicked way," remarked Kenneth.

"Moreover," pursued Abdullah, "there come to me tales of robbery and bloodshed down the desert ways."

"Would my lord have us turn back, then?" asked Kenneth.

"Nay," was the response. "Who am I to say to Chisholm Bey and his friends, 'Thus and thus shall ye do, thus and thus shall ye not do'? Far be the sin of presumption from me. Ye shall do according to your pleasure. Only, as I would see you go and come in safety, take, I beseech you, an hundred of my best spearmen, and let them guard you."

As he listened to the suave voice, watched the cunning eyes, there came to Kenneth's mind the proverb concerning the gifts that are no gift but a snare.

"Reject not the hundred spears," said Abdullah, in his sleekest manner. He leaned forward, his small eyes twinkling. "By the Prophet's beard, in loneliness and danger there is much comfort in steel."

"Truly," Kenneth assented, "when wicked men lie in wait to destroy, five-score spears in the hands of five-score brave warriors are indeed a very present aid in time of need. How much more when Satan himself lurks for a prey!"

"Thou hast said it," smiled Abdullah. "The spears are at thy service."

The interview over, Kenneth, as in duty bound, explained the offer. Partly from policy and partly from genuine alarm, Mrs. Fairhurst was horrified. A sudden vision of all Europe and America gaping aghast

Faces in the Mist

over the cabled report of a hideous massacre in the wilds of Arabia made her perspire coldly. Here surely was justification of all her objections to this preposterous excursion.

"Let us get back!" she cried, showing symptoms of hysterics. "Let us get away out of this! I am sure something dreadful will happen if we don't. Rube, please get the engine headed for Damascus. I won't go another step."

"Why, mother?" Pamela laughed. "You're losing your nerve." Her own blood was coursing as if to music.

"Isn't it you that's losing your common sense?" was the retort. "I don't know what's come over everybody, or what brought us here, anyway. I call it madness—sheer downright madness."

"Appears to me we're having a fairly good time, Susannah," Mr. Fairhurst observed. "And this air is a mighty good tonic. Where does it come from, anyway?" He drew a deep, exhilarating breath.

"The uncharted spaces of the desert," Kenneth replied.

"It makes me sick," declared Mrs. Fairhurst, her face an eloquent signal of distress. "Don't you think we've had enough of this horrid wilderness, Lord Benbreck?" she asked, turning to her trusty adherent.

He agreed with all his heart—could, in fact, have used much stronger language than hers in condemnation of the entire proceeding. The debate was still going on when a telegram was put into the hands of Kenneth.

"From the chief," he remarked, glancing at it. "Something needed official attention in the neighbourhood of Darel Hamra. Would Chisholm Bey see to it?"

"I guess there's but one answer to that," said Mr. Fairhurst, who understood such things. "You attend

Abdullah and the Hundred Spears

to business. We'll worry along for ourselves for a bit."

The sunshine died in Pamela's eyes.

"And how long must we be by ourselves?" she asked, as though waiting were a penitential exercise.

"Not long," he replied. "A few hours. Of course, I can decline."

"And of course you'll do nothing of the kind, if you please," put in Mr. Fairhurst. "We should blame ourselves badly if we interfered with your duty. When a chief politely solicits a favour, the request has all the force of a command. You go."

Upon that Kenneth agreed, but insisted on leaving his servant to attend to them till his own return.

Pamela swallowed her disappointment, but not before it was marked by the jealous eye of Benbreck. So my lady could not do without her knight; was in danger of pining when he was out of sight! And—and what a knight!

For a minute a fierce tempest raged under the calm exterior. Then came a sudden change. My lord's heart rose thrilling as to a great opportunity. Chisholm would be absent a day, perhaps longer. On an odd chance he might never return. Benbreck felt he had dallied and dangled too long. When the interloper returned, his impudence should be rebuked by an announcement which would show him just where he stood and of how little consequence he was.

CHAPTER XVII

BENBRECK'S STRATEGY AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

BENBRECK saw Kenneth off as affably as if he were taking leave of a friend on the steps of his club in Pall Mall.

"So long!" he said gaily. "So long! Don't fall out with the Arabs. I understand they cut throats with a shocking disregard of ceremony." He laughed lightly, with a glint of white teeth, like a cat grinning in satisfaction.

Pamela, standing beside Carew, watched Kenneth hastening away, impatient, as she told herself, to be off and back again. At the point of disappearance he turned, raising his helmet in farewell salute, and she waved her hand in response. Fancying she sighed, Benbreck turned to her quickly, and there was that in her face which was almost too much for him even in that moment of high hope. But thrusting down the instincts of the natural man, the diplomat stepped briskly forward.

"What next?" he asked, as if waiting her pleasure. Pamela turned with a little gasp like one startled, then coloured suddenly.

"Oh!" she answered. "Oh, anything you like."

"It is for you to suggest," he rejoined gallantly.

"As we're stuck here for some time, anyway," put in Carew, "what do you say to a camel ride out into the desert a bit. It would be real fun. Haven't been on a camel since I was so high, and then it was in the Zoo."

Benbreck's Strategy and what came of it

"When you have anything sensible to propose, let us hear from you again, Carew dear," his mother remarked severely.

She looked at Benbreck, a world of meaning in her face. The perversities of youth and the malice of fate had combined to hinder the event on which their hearts were set. The pause in a mad performance afforded a chance that ought not to be neglected. "Look to your interests while there is time," she seemed to say. "A lover should be assiduous and bold. Have courage!" And he understood as clearly as if the monition was spoken audibly in his ear.

With Pamela she thought it her duty to be more explicit.

"I notice a disposition to tease Lord Benbreck," she said, when presently they were by themselves. "It's natural, perhaps; but don't overdo it, Pam—don't overdo it. Don't forget he has come all this way for your sake; and I'm afraid the poor fellow feels badly hurt at times."

"Then we'll nurse him as tenderly as ever we can, mother dear," was the response. "But why or how does he feel hurt? It's not jealousy, is it? I wouldn't have anything to do with a jealous man."

"Where there's no love there will be no jealousy," returned Mrs. Fairhurst, shrewdly. "He's the soul of loyalty to you, Pam. And if you're wise you won't try him too much. Don't overstrain a man's patience and devotion. It's bad policy. And don't forget what it means to be a British Countess. Pam dear, be wise."

"Oh, mother," cried Pamela, with sudden emotion, "still harping on that? I tell you——" She stopped as one choking off a dangerous or forbidden sentiment.

"What?" demanded her mother, staring in apprehension.

Faces in the Mist

"Nothing," replied Pamela, her breast throbbing wildly. "Nothing."

"Don't tell me that, Pam," rejoined Mrs. Fairhurst. "There is something. You like Lord Benbreck, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, very much—very much indeed."

"Then let him know. Tell him."

"I have told him, mother. He mustn't expect too much, or be unreasonable. And now, mother dear, we're on holiday, aren't we? Don't let us quarrel about—men."

"I wish I had her safely back in London," Mrs. Fairhurst remarked to her husband, a little later. "She troubles me. Rube, it would be an awful thing if—if anything were to go wrong in this business." Her hair rose at the bare idea.

"Don't you worry, Susannah," Mr. Fairhurst counselled. "Pam's all right!"

"Hope so," sighed Mrs. Fairhurst, despondently. "Wish I could feel sure of it."

"If only Benbreck would brace up," she thought, in a quivering impatience. Mrs. Fairhurst, who knew her own sex to the last subtle twist of feeling, was perfectly well aware that in the great enterprise of wooing it is the gallant spirit that wins. Women have an instinctive admiration for intrepidity; are taken by a bustling lover, like to be carried off their feet by the tempest of passion. That is why the ugly and unlikely so often wrest the prizes from their betters. Lord Benbreck was perhaps (she admitted the idea with extreme diffidence), perhaps a little too much of the dilettante. She did not doubt his will, his intention, but his ardour had not the white heat that carries all before it. But there for once she did him wrong.

In a spirit which had neither dawdling nor dilettantism, he proceeded to take possession of Pamela, and

Benbreck's Strategy and what came of it

she seemed glad, exuberantly glad. Ah! she was beginning to realise her privileges. Benbreck's pulses drummed with a dizzying rapture. It was odd to have to come to the Arabian desert for his million, but then destiny is always original. He imagined the wild shock of joy with which the old Earl would receive the message confirming his dearest hopes. "Think what we could do with a million sterling!" The words leaped afresh to Benbreck's mind. A million! Pah! Two million; perhaps three, perhaps more. Benbreck's imagination worked riotously. He would return the most envied man in Europe. Ha! ha! To the great task at once.

They stood 4,000 feet above sea-level, in the midst of peaks and precipices of the Nubian sandstone which won for Darel Hamra, as for Edom, the appellative red. In the brilliant sunshine these glowed as though they were part of the splendid mirages which so often surprised and delighted the travellers. Their stupendous size and endless variety of shape immediately struck the eye. But their peculiar distinction, their alluring charm lay in the unique and superb blending of colours. It might seem that a wandering artist of grandiose genius, using a colossal brush, had first drenched the cliffs with bright red, and then, finding the glare unbearable, had softened it with bands of pink and yellow, fantastic designs of violet, purple and blue. In the luminous light they shimmered as if dipped in rainbow hues.

"The Cairn Dhu Crag, magnified and glorified," Pamela remarked, as if speaking to herself.

"Pity Mr. Chisholm isn't here to try a fall over them," Carew laughed, good-humouredly.

Benbreck grinned in agreement. It were, indeed, a consummation devoutly to be wished!

Pamela did not notice the pleasantries. She was gazing with rapt intensity at the jagged, splintered

Faces in the Mist

pinnacles and the darkling chasms, cleft, as it appeared, in the solid mountain of rock. In there, among those barbarous crags and defiles, Kenneth had proved his talent. That huddled, peaked, serrated mass, heaved and rent by volcanic forces into a thousand wild and grotesque shapes, was the hardest piece of engineering on the line, and Kenneth was the man chosen to blast, bridge, and tunnel a way through. He had done it to the admiration of everybody and the vast benefit of his own reputation.

"Ach! Cheesholm Bey is a great engineer," the German chief told her in Damascus. "He would tunnel the Alps seerently, seerently. He would lay a mine unter Geebraltar smiling. He ought to have been keelled many times. Yet he lives. And his men worship him. It is wonterful."

As she recalled the words, Pamela's heart surged with a wild, illogical jubilancy, and her face glowed as if catching the radiance of the many-coloured cliffs.

From the first this was the spot she most desired to see. At Batn-el-Gruhl, Teubuk, and elsewhere, when Kenneth pointed out and praised the feats of brother engineers, she would smile and say, "And yours—when shall we reach your particular section?" It was a stroke of irony that when at last her eyes were on the precipices with which he had fought and won, he should not be there to answer her teeming questions. But his absence certainly did not diminish her interest in him or his achievement.

During the fierce heat of the day the party were obliged to keep under cover; but when the sun declined into what looked like a sea of blood, and a suggestion of coolness began to move on the heights of Darel Hamra, Benbreck slyly proposed to Pamela a little excursion on their own account.

"It's romantic," he remarked, with a fine air of

Benbreck's Strategy and what came of it

appreciation, "and those cliffs glow as if they were going to break into fire. The air, too, sparkles like—champagne." It was the highest compliment he could pay. "Spiffing!" he added. "Makes one feel as if created on springs, doesn't it?"

He was proceeding on a deep and artful plan of luring her forth; but, indeed, she needed no luring. Her zest for the adventure was at least as keen as his own. The heady joy of surprise gave him a feeling of intoxication. He was treading not on springs but on air, supping on ambrosia, drinking nectar—the nectar and ambrosia of hope near the fulfilment. Beyond all doubt she was beginning to realise her privileges.

"Is it safe?" Mrs. Fairhurst asked, in a little flutter, when she found what was afoot.

"Safe as a European highway," Benbreck told her. "The long, strong arm of the Porte has made that all right."

Assured by such an authority, she gave a beaming approval. "Very well," she said, looking meaningfully at Benbreck. He understood her to say, "Your chance has come; take it."

At the last moment Pamela turned to Carew, saying that of course he would come, too.

"You bet!" was the prompt reply. "And we'll take Abu Ali, Mr. Chisholm's servant, for guide. He knows the way round. Everybody tall of this bit of engineering—everybody but the man who did it. Yes, certainly I'll go."

A cloud of disappointment passed over Benbreck's face. He had planned a company of two, and lo, a company of four; but one must make the best of circumstances. The presence of her brother and that wretched servant must not be allowed to be an obstacle.

They set off in a ripple of merriment, Mrs. Fairhurst

Faces in the Mist

waving her hand and warning them lightly to be careful. By the way they met straggling groups of ragged, diseased, degenerate Arabs, who greeted them obsequiously and volubly invoked the blessing of Allah.

"Frowsy lot!" remarked Benbreck, contemptuously. "Not much to fear from them, I fancy."

Nevertheless, being in high feather, he bestowed bucksheesh with amazing liberality. Thank goodness, he could soon afford to be generous. Already he gripped the skirts of Fortune, and had no mind to let go.

Behind, Mr. and Mrs. Fairhurst watched the receding figures, which were visible a long way off by reason of their whiteness and the extraordinary lucidity of the atmosphere.

When at last they disappeared, as if swallowed by the mountain gloom, Mrs. Fairhurst drew a deep breath of mingled satisfaction and anxiety.

"Hope it's all right," she said. "About time some announcement was made. Been expected for some time now, I guess."

When Chisholm returned there would be a tale to tell that would make his ears tingle. There would indeed. She little guessed how literally her prophecy was to be fulfilled.

They took a turn indoors returning presently to a rocky seat close by the station, whence they inhaled the evening balm as they watched the sun dip to the horizon beyond the Red Sea, in draperies of flaming crimson and gold. It sank, a molten orb, till only a fiery crescent remained. That too sank, and at a stride night was on the land. Mrs. Fairhurst leaped to her feet with a curious thrill of cold at the spine.

"They ought to be back," she said. "They ought to remember how suddenly darkness comes in the tropics."

Benbreck's Strategy and what came of it

"It's not very dark," responded her husband, glancing skyward. The heavens were still luminous with the glow from the west. "I guess they'll soon be here."

"Rube," said Mrs. Fairhurst, "I don't like this. I have been thinking as we sat here, and I don't like it. We shouldn't have let them go out."

She had scarcely spoken, when a sudden patter of running feet caught their ears. Next moment Abu Ali dashed up, bareheaded, wild-eyed, panting, and threw himself upon the ground before them.

"Mercy!" he said brokenly. "Mercy!"

"What is it?" Mrs. Fairhurst demanded, almost choking in the agony of her terror.

"The lady and gentleman!" returned Abu Ali, breathlessly.

"What of them?" asked Mr. Fairhurst. "Has anything happened to them?"

"O my lord, my lord, be not wroth with me," was the distracted answer. "They have been taken by guile and force, yea, they have been made captive, and are carried away. But it was not my fault, lord, not my fault," he pleaded, his forehead on the dust.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON THE TRACK OF THE BRIGANDS

FOR half a minute Mrs. Fairhurst stood motionless in a dazed, blank silence. Then there broke from her a low wail as of one incurably hurt.

"Rube," she said, "what did I tell you? Why, oh why did we ever come here?" But Mr. Fairhurst was busy with the messenger.

"Rise," he ordered. "You needn't grovel. Now answer my questions, and be as brief and plain as you know how. There were three besides yourself. Are they all made captive?"

Abu Ali lifted himself, clucking as if trying to swallow something that would not go down.

"Nay, only two," he replied. "The lady and one of my lords the gentlemen. The other remains, and he sent me hither, saying, 'Run, run, as if death were at thy heels.' And, my lord, I have run till I am as windless as spent bellows, yea, and my ribs are torn asunder." He pressed a hand to each side, as though to keep himself from falling to pieces.

"You have done well in running with all your might," Mr. Fairhurst told him encouragingly. "Tell me what happened in your own way, only please be quick."

The Oriental's way is a long way—a way full of turnings and twistings and much verbiage. Moreover, Abu Ali was in such fear that he was constantly interrupting the narrative with excuses, explanations and pleas for mercy. But at last, by dint of patience

On the Track of the Brigands

and close questioning, Mr. Fairhurst made out that Benbreck and Pamela were ambushed and seized while separated from the others, having wandered off by themselves for reasons that might be guessed. The captors had manifestly laid their plans and stalked their game with diabolic cunning. For the capture was a swoop and an instant vanishing from the sight.

"The lord who is made captive," Abu Ali explained, "said to the lady, 'Let us go by ourselves,' whereupon they departed a little space from us. Then there was a cry as of one in sudden fear, and we, the other lord and thy servant, leaped to their aid; but lo! they were plucked out of our sight as if snatched up into a cloud. I, who know the way of robbers, was amazed."

Carew, in fact, preferring to remain, in hope of being useful, had dispatched the Egyptian to give the alarm and summon aid.

"Thus it is, my lord," he ended. "And verily I speak the truth in saying the fault was not mine." Of a sudden there was the sound of quick, firm footsteps behind, and, turning with a stifled cry, Abu Ali again threw himself on his face.

"My lord and master," he cried, "my lord and master, I am in woe!"

Kenneth, for it was he, drew up with a sharp quiver of misgiving.

"Why art thou on thy face?" he asked in Arabic.

"What means all this?"

"Slay thy servant, my lord, and end his calamity," was the response.

"As surely as thou deservest death thou shalt die," rejoined Kenneth. "Speak, that I may know. What hast thou to tell me?"

"A grievous tale, my lord," the man whined.

"A very grievous tale. They who are thy friends,

Faces in the Mist

with whom, at their bidding, I went out among the rocks yonder, have been taken by robbers."

"Great heaven!" cried Kenneth, turning to Mr. Fairhurst. "Is what this man says true?"

"I don't know what he says," answered Mr. Fairhurst, with a coolness that was a triumph of American self-possession. "But he has just brought word that my daughter and Lord Benbreck are captured by brigands—Bedouins, I guess. Carew, I make out, has escaped."

Before Kenneth could speak another word, Mrs. Fairhurst ran up to him in a sudden frenzy of grief and rage. At sight of him all her latent antipathies blazed up. Was he not the cause of all their troubles? Did he not come between her and the dearest wish of her heart, and was he not directly responsible for the present disaster? Disaster! The maleficent acquaintance began in disaster, grew in disaster, and was ending in the worst disaster of all.

"See what comes of your trip!" she told him bitterly. "Are we to lose our daughter in this—this horrible fashion?"

An instant, Kenneth reeled before the cruel, unjust attack, but only an instant.

"Not if I can help it, Mrs. Fairhurst," he replied, with a hard rein on his feelings.

"Find her then!" cried Mrs. Fairhurst. "Find her! But for you she would never have been here; and oh, I wish, I wish——"

"Susannah dear, Susannah!" protested Mr. Fairhurst.

"I can understand Mrs. Fairhurst's feelings," said Kenneth. "By and by she may know better. Meantime, it is scarcely necessary to say that I will do all in my power to restore Miss Fairhurst to her. If I had not gone off on that little duty, I think this

On the Track of the Brigands

would not have happened. We must act at once. Tell me what you know."

Mr. Fairhurst complied, speaking quickly but lucidly, and then asked, "What do you propose to do, Mr. Chisholm?"

"Discover the captives," was the prompt answer. "On one point I believe I can assure Mrs. Fairhurst and yourself—that their lives are not in danger. Neither will they be subjected to ill-treatment. They are held for ransom. We must be on the captors before they have time to get away where it would be hard to follow. Instant action is necessary."

Half an hour later he went out at the head of a little band of Turkish soldiers, his servant acting as guide. Mr. Fairhurst insisted on going also, though his wife had to be left in a fever of dread. What if she, too, were captured and carried off? Who was to guarantee the honesty of those about her?

"Oh, what fools we have been!" she declared, her anger blazing anew.

"Even Solomon wasn't always wise, Susannah," her husband reminded her softly. "We'll come out of this all right, never you fear."

He had his own sore misgivings, his own sharp fears, but he kept them rigorously to himself.

Since goats were the only animals that would have any chance of keeping their feet in the heart of Darel Hamra, the party went on foot. But by an artful mixture of authority and diplomacy, of cajolery and coercion, Kenneth managed to have a patrol of cavalry, that by a lucky chance was available, dispatched to cut off the chance of escape into the desert. As to themselves, their first business was to find Carew, who would probably be able to put them on the track they sought.

"Take us to the place whence the young lord sent you hither," Kenneth instructed his man. "And

Faces in the Mist

let thy speed be as that of a hungry lion pursuing his prey."

The moon rose as they went forth, shedding a pale glitter far eastward over the sleeping desert, and westward over the hilltops bordering the Red Sea. For a little they could discern the horsemen, tiny black dots on a whitish ground, bearing swiftly north-east by the piled-up sand-drifts of the foot-hills. In front the jumbled, riven mass of Darel Hamra was lighted with weird, incongruous effects that suggested the scenery of some monstrous pantomime. Behind, emphasizing the incongruity enhancing the unreality, a train steamed in, northward bound, from Medina, and Kenneth knew that the sensation would thrill along the line to Damascus, throwing all officialdom into commotion. The breath of the desert came up aromatic and stimulating, and they swung along, Mr. Fairhurst keeping step with the foremost. Presently they reached a gorge-mouth, and halted to confer. The men looked to their arms while their officer took final counsel with Chisholm Bey.

"We shoot if we sight the robbers?" he said crisply. "It may be needful," was the reply. "But for the love of Allah take care whom you shoot."

"Shall we shoot them whom we come to save?" returned the officer. "But the Bedouins are insolent and deceitful. They swore allegiance to the Great Sultan, and lo! ere the oath had well passed their false lips, they were lying in wait for us at dead of night; yea, trying to take us by surprise. By the Prophet's beard, they need a lesson. Let the vultures have food!"

"It were well done," Kenneth agreed. "Only, shoot not at random. One thing we may accomplish, but another is beyond our skill. We may deliver from the hand of the spoiler; we cannot bring back from the dead."

On the Track of the Brigands

"Fear not!" responded the other. "We shall not desire the return of any that we send to the realms of death."

With that he turned to his men, and in a low voice explained their duty.

"We are come out on a twofold business," he told them. "To rescue and to punish; to restore the friends of the Sultan's friend, Chisholm Bey, and to do what is in our hearts to their enemies and ours. But take good heed that ye make not the end worse than the beginning. Ye know the Bedouins could teach cunning to Satan."

"Yes, we know; but their cunning shall not avail them," was the response.

They entered the defile, which in reality was a mere slit in the vast barrier of rock, scarcely capable of taking two men abreast, and were lost in the blackness of darkness. A deep, awesome silence imparted an uneasy sense of lurking perils. It was as if Nature herself held her breath over some impending catastrophe. And in truth, in that utter blackness, they might at any moment come plump upon the enemy, or be ambushed and cut up. Yet they durst not seek the light, since to do that would give the wily Arabs their chance, for, of course, they would have scouts out.

"Suppose we shout," Mr. Fairhurst suggested. "It might help us to find Carew, and that would be something."

The darkness, the isolation, the helpless groping, were telling on his nerves. He was not used to situations that baffled wit and made energy a mockery. Kenneth gave convincing arguments against advertising their presence, and they kept on, feeling their way with extraordinary caution. But in spite of wariness, their slipping, stumbling feet awoke echoes that often made them halt, holding their breath.

Kenneth himself led, the instinct and intuition

Faces in the Mist

of the born mountaineer aiding him. Hill-craft born of episodes, generally forbidden, among the crags and chasms in the far-off Highlands served him well among those of Darel Hamra. But he never explored in such darkness, nor under pressure of such motives. It was no new thing to take his life in his hand; he had done it gaily again and again; but it was new to risk it for the purpose that now spurred him on. For he pictured to himself Pamela in distress, undergoing hardship, it might be indignities, at the hands of the villains who held her. The thought made him shiver and burn simultaneously—shiver with dread, burn with rage. If he found so much as a hair of her head injured, by all the powers! the guilty should pay for their villainy. In this stress of feeling he forgot his footing and tripped. The peril restored his caution and self-possession.

Presently they reached a deep, saucer-like hollow, scooped, as it appeared, out of the very heart of the rock, and strewn with vast blocks of volcanic debris. By the light of a very bright moon they could see several openings in the circling wall, leading, as they knew, to labyrinths beyond. Which should they take?

They were debating this question, keeping cautiously in the shadow of a cliff, when all at once the officer laid an excited hand on Kenneth's arm and pointed upward. In the vivid moonlight the shadow of a man was distinctly visible. For half a minute not a breath was drawn nor an eye winked among the watchers.

"It moves!" said the officer then. "See! see! Allah be praised! our quest is to be successful. There shall be food for the vultures."

He signed to his men to be ready, and half a dozen rifles swung forward, their muzzles gleaming like tiny rings in the edge of the moonlight. But Kenneth was beseeching his friend not to give the order to fire.

On the Track of the Brigands

"It would give the alarm," he argued. "We must learn of our enemies, and proceed by stealth."

The shadow moved erratically, rising and falling and shooting to and fro. Then of a sudden it disappeared.

"He is gone!" panted the officer in the bitterness of disappointment. "He has escaped us!"

But next instant it was up again. What was the man doing, and why did he not make himself visible?

"I will reconnoitre," said the officer softly. "The whole band may be there, and Allah will deliver them into our hand."

He was on the point of carrying out his intention, when, a hundred feet above, a bare head appeared. A soldier, knowing what was in his officer's mind, took aim, but Mr. Fairhurst struck the rifle down.

"Why, it's Carew!" he cried, in such excitement as he had never felt before, and sprang, shouting, out into the open.

CHAPTER XIX

THE MESSAGE ON THE SPEAR

CAREW scrambled down, he scarcely knew how, his clothes in ribbons, his feet bare and bleeding. Mr. Fairhurst was not emotional, but his eyes were moist and his voice unsteady as he greeted his son.

"What have you been doing to your feet?" was his first question.

"Kicked off my boots because they slipped and made a noise," was the answer. "Then, as my socks were very soon in shreds and catching on things, thought I'd be better without them, too. It didn't take me long to find out one can climb and hang on best bare-footed, besides being much quieter. Oh, I've come slap back to Nature, I tell you."

"Doesn't seem to be exactly a pleasant process," remarked Mr. Fairhurst, recovering his self-possession.

"Had it pretty hot for the last hour or two," Carew admitted.

"Are things as bad as your messenger reports?" Mr. Fairhurst asked, burning for information. "Any news of Pam and Lord Benbreck?"

"None, I'm sorry to say," was the reply. "It's the best case of spiriting away I every heard of. Talk of folding the tents like the Arabs, and as silently stealing off. One moment all was chirpy, the next Benbreck and Pam had vanished as if they were air."

"You were stalked, of course," said Kenneth, who had come forward with the others, and stood listening.

"Of course," said Carew, "and most efficiently stalked, too. What beats me is the quickness of the

The Message on the Spear

performance. It was positively the slickest thing I ever saw or heard of. Appears to me the simple Arab hasn't much to learn in wiliness."

"Why didn't you hold together?" asked Mr. Fairhurst. "What made you separate?"

"It was Benbreck's doing; all the time trying to get Pam off by herself to explore what he called the romantic nooks and corners. Wanted to talk private, I reckon. Well, Pam was all curiosity, and off they went. They haven't come back yet, and that's about the amount of it."

"Have you any idea what direction they took?" Kenneth asked, his lips tightening grimly.

"I'll just give you particulars in a word or two," Carew replied. "The thing came off so suddenly that, of course, we were off our guard. Hearing a stifled cry, your servant and I made a bolt. We were just in time to get a glimpse of some flying skirts and turbans going round a corner. We made after them, but were met by some men who wheeled and faced us, showing their teeth and their weapons at the same time. I asked your servant to speak to them in their own tongue, and demand what they meant by such conduct. He did, translating question and answer as best he could in conditions that weren't exactly ideal. The sum and substance of the talk was that if we tried to advance a step the eagles would have a feast. Talk of that sort when you can't reply properly is embarrassing. I didn't know very well what to do, but I stated through my interpreter that if they did any harm to inoffensive strangers they would pay for it smartly. I must own they were not impressed. Then I asked what they meant by carrying off my friends."

"Because they are Nazarenes," I was told, "and defile the Sacred Railway. Have they not designs upon the Holy City itself?"

Faces in the Mist

"They added that but for sheer kindness they would take me also, and were good enough to intimate I might ransom my friends. It appears a cash payment will blot out all transgressions, and I was left at liberty in order to procure the money. I got angry, then, said we wouldn't pay a cent, and demanded the immediate release of their prisoners."

"And the result?" asked his father, with a sharp catch of the breath.

"A laugh that made the rocks ring. If I had been armed, which they saw I wasn't, I'd have shot somebody then. 'Ha, ha, but thou wilt think again,' they told me, 'for is not the life of a friend more precious than much gold?'"

"It's money the villains want," cried Mr. Fairhurst. "What happened next, Carew?"

"They began to retire, keeping the bead on us till they got to a turning in the gorge. This place is like a rabbit warren for holes and turnings. A minute afterwards two of them grinned at us from the top of a rock as they patted their weapons. 'We will tell you the sum of money that must be brought,' they informed me. 'Bide ye patiently.' Then the pair slipped off, leaving us staring at the rocks."

"And the whole are gone," said Mr. Fairhurst, his face blenching more and more. "It seems," he added, turning quickly to Kenneth, "they are in a position to make their own terms. The methods of the Greek brigands have been imported into Arabia. We may take it that those with whom we have to deal will be restrained by no scruple of pity or of honour. That being so, our obvious, our only course, is to comply, however much we may squirm. My daughter must be recovered at any cost. So must Lord Benbreck. I could never face his father if anything happened to him. If it's money they want, let them have it. Thank God I can pay."

The Message on the Spear

It was dead against all Kenneth's notions and intentions to play into the hands of the brigands so meekly. But it was no time for argument; neither was it a time to oppose or depress Mr. Fairhurst.

"Let us get on, then," he said. "Wish we had even a vague idea where the villains are."

"Appears to me to be pretty much like hunting eels in a bed of bulrushes in here," observed Carew.

"Talk of craft, Red Indians aren't in it with Bedouins. When the thing happened, I at once sent your man for help, meaning myself to keep an eye on them till somebody came. But they did the vanishing trick with a cleverness that baffled me. They managed just a little too beautifully."

"You haven't even heard anything?" said Mr. Fairhurst, his anxiety manifest in the twitching of his face and a certain uncharacteristic quiver of the voice. "Pam would shout for help if she could."

"Not a sound," Carew was obliged to confess. "It's been like a cemetery."

And, indeed, the blank, deathlike stillness was one of the most awesome, dismaying elements in the case.

"Great Heavens!" cried Mr. Fairhurst, shuddering as he had not shuddered in all his life before. "What if we're too late? What if even money won't avail?"

Kenneth argued consolingly against any such conclusion.

"If Bedouins are brigands they are not fools," he said. "Their very villainy is in our favour for they're much too shrewd to spoil their own game by any folly of violence."

"But if the prisoners were troublesome, as they most likely would be," suggested Mr. Fairhurst, still in a cold fear. "Pam would be sure to fight if she's got the chance. So would Lord Benbreck, I

Faces in the Mist

reckon. That would provoke the brigands, and anything might happen."

"Our hope is in Bedouin cupidity, and it is well founded," Kenneth assured him. "The noble Arab can be as Jewish as any Jew. Do you think you can do a little more climbing," he asked Carew, with a glance at his crimson feet.

"Guess I can try," was the cheery and confident answer. "Go ahead."

"And Mr. Chisholm," said Mr. Fairhurst, anxiously, "will you please tell these men they are not expected to do all this for nothing? They shall be rewarded; and he who is foremost in rescuing my daughter shall have a special award."

The prospect of gold made the men's faces gleam. "Lead us on," their officer was told, "that we may both smite and succour."

A double motive impelled them, the strongest that can move men—gain and revenge. The stranger who promised reward was rich even beyond the dreams of a Caliph, and there were scores to settle with Bedouins who bothered tired troops by making rushes at dead of night. It's an ill wind that brings nobody good.

Since the defiles were to be avoided as death traps, the rescue party spread cautiously along the heights, taking prudent care to keep in cover. With daylight and undivided attention for their footing, the course would have tried expert climbers and scouts. Night, natural perils, and the sense of a lurking foe, added to the hazards and multiplied the injuries.

"They have chosen their place of refuge like—like brigands," the officer remarked resentfully to Kenneth, rubbing a torn knee. "It is worse than pursuing foxes among caves and holes."

To Kenneth it suggested rabbit-hunting over square

The Message on the Spear

miles of ravines and littered rocks, with this pertinent difference, that the quarry might at any moment reverse the game by having a pot shot at the hunters. The men cursed audibly as they slipped or fell among the sharp points, leaving behind fragments of cloth or fractions of skin. By the love of vengeance, the Bedouin should pay dearly for all this sweating, this damage to person and property. But you must catch your thief before you hang him.

Hour followed hour without bringing the searchers clue or encouragement. The moon waned and went down; the stars dotted over a dark sky, shone for a little with extraordinary brilliancy, and the searchers redoubled their activity and their vigilance. But the invisible Bedouins remained invisible. Had they gone westward among the hills towards the Red Sea, or were they lying close at hand, crouched like tigers for the spring? These questions kept every sense alert, every nerve aquiver.

A light wind began to blow from the vast spaces of the desert away to the east, and one by one the stars disappeared, leaving a darkness that made search impossible. The party drew together and halted, in spirits the reverse of good. Of them all, Mr. Fairhurst was least himself. He was sore from the violent and unaccustomed exertion. His hands were raw, his joints seemed to be torn asunder, his clothes were such as he would not offer to a beggar in New York. But these things were forgotten in a haunting dread, a nervous tension, wholly uncharacteristic of the cool-brained, self-confident American man of affairs.

He knew what it was to be beaten (that is an essential part of the education of all successful men), but the horror of helplessness in a crisis crying above all for action was an absolutely new discovery, and threw his whole being out of gear. "Act, act! Keep on acting

Faces in the Mist

with all your might," had been his motto for emergencies. Here was the biggest emergency of his life, and behold, his strenuous philosophy mocked and turned to naught. If the Fates take delight in seeing human power baffled, human pride humiliated, they must gloat over the spectacle of the strong man writhing helplessly in the coil of circumstance. That way lie despair and madness and sudden death.

Cheerfulness was out of the question, but Kenneth did his best to maintain confidence, and the strong man had strength enough left to shut his lips tight on any querulous cry of despair or impotency. But he got a lesson. "He laughs at scars who never felt a wound." Never again would he laugh at anyone for being emotional or anxious or perturbed under stress of trial. But would the dawn were come to relieve the tension by possibility of action.

It came presently with a flashing leap over the sleeping desert. First, there was a sudden grey quiver as if light and darkness grappled for mastery on the edge of the world. Then the victorious light, welling and flooding over the rim, sent up an arrowy shaft that clove the blackness from horizon to zenith. Another minute, and the black mass of Darel Hamra rose, as it were, bodily out of the night, its ragged, fluted pinnacles and precipices burning with gold or flushing with rose.

"Thank God," said Mr. Fairhurst, drawing the long, deep breath of one who has held himself in almost to bursting. "I was never so glad to see the light."

Kenneth's practised eye followed keenly from point to point where the light fell. All at once he held his breath.

"They're near," he said, in a low voice. "See!" He pointed upward to what seemed a small stake or staff, on which fluttered something white.

"By Jove!" cried Carew in thrilling excitement.

The Message on the Spear

"We've got 'em at last. Come, boys, come along."
But Kenneth put out a cautioning hand.

"That stake is steel," he remarked; "at least in part, for it's a spear thrust into the ground. What it holds is probably a message for us. Now we've got to call all our wits to our aid, and, above all, to keep cool, for we're under observation."

He was right. The foxes were watching.

CHAPTER XX

THE CONFERENCE

THEY climbed in frantic haste, for most part on hands and knees, the pulses of the coolest drumming deliriously. In a small dip at the top, they halted, crouching low, and held a whispered consultation.

"This is my venture," Kenneth said. "Stay here while I see what is yonder."

With that he stood upright, putting aside protests against his going alone, and walked quickly along a little ridge, his figure set in sharp relief by the level sun. Taking the paper from the spear-head with a perfectly steady hand, he stood quietly and read it; then composedly walked back to his companions.

"What we expected," he told them. "A message written in Arabic and French by one who dashes insolence with humour." He translated thus:

"Greeting. Verily ye are welcome, my lambs, if ye be wise. We know that your anger is most grievously kindled against us, and that ye have sworn oaths of vengeance. Are we dismayed? Come and see. Only take heed to your feet lest they stumble, yea, and beware meetings and hot disputes by the way. Such things lead to the shedding of blood. Hark ye! Allah and his Prophet have ordained that gold shall delight the heart of man. Is it for us to gainsay? Now consider, we pray you, whether ye shall give gold and be made glad by the return of them ye seek, or whether ye shall go mourning for them all the days of your life.

The Conference

Know ye the desert? It devoureth more ravenously than a wild beast. If ye be foolish your friends shall go whither ye cannot follow. Let Chisholm Bey come out alone and stand where the spear is set upright; then one of us will also go out and talk with him. Be wise, my lambs. Ye would not have innocent blood on your heads."

"Pretty cool and quite unmistakeable," Carew commented.

"Pam and Lord Benbreck are evidently all right so far," said Mr. Fairhurst. "That's the main thing. What do you propose to do, Mr. Chisholm?"

"To appear perfectly pliant," was the answer. "They want gold; it is necessary we should have information. Therefore, we must seem to comply. And we must decide quickly, for, of course, they're watching now like lizards from the crevices of the rocks."

"Mr. Chisholm," said Mr. Fairhurst with emphasis, "I hate putting you into such a position. You're not going alone. I'll go with you."

"And I, too," put in Carew, whose eagerness to be "right in" anything that happened overcame all thoughts of peril.

"Thank you," Kenneth returned with a smile. "But that would spoil things by increasing the suspicions of the other side. I must go alone according to orders. Lie down, and keep quite still here, please."

Again he walked forward and took his place by the upright spear. Scarcely had he done so when a turbaned head rose from behind a rock in front, and a pair of glittering eyes peered at him. He bowed politely to the head and eyes. Their owner returned the salute with a grin.

"Ah! my lord," he said, in good French, "this vexes me, in good truth it does. But who shall say to necessity 'Get thee gone'? Satan himself will sooner obey. Are not your men-at-arms somewhat

Faces in the Mist

too close?" he added, with a shrewd look into the little hollow below. "If it please you, bid them withdraw a space that we may confer in peace."

"And yours," returned Kenneth, "are they not at hand?"

"Will my lord come and see?" was the answer.

"Nay, nay," responded Kenneth, well aware how little his looking could avail. "I came not to spy, but to confer. Let us rather withdraw ourselves, you and I together. That will give us peace."

The man cast a swift glance over his shoulder as if making a sign of intelligence to someone in hiding behind.

"Be it as my lord wishes," he agreed then, with an affability that would have done no discredit to the subtlest diplomat in Europe.

Stepping lightly forward he plucked the spear from between the stones that held it in place. This was not because he needed weapons, for his gaily-coloured sash was heavy with them. He was a man of Kenneth's own age, agile, graceful, subtle, crafty, with handsome features and black, bead-like eyes. It was obvious, at a glance, that he was no common Bedouin robber. He had, in fact, been educated in Cairo, travelled afterwards, learned many languages and some Western ways, and returned an accomplished schemer to mingle the vices of East and West. Hence, to mark his familiarity with the Great World, he used French.

"One small thing before we go," he said, with a little smile, which somehow reminded Kenneth of Benbreck's. "I have the honour, have I not, of speaking with Chisholm Bey, whose glorious fame fills even the great void of the desert?"

Kenneth bowed.

"And I; whom have I the honour of addressing?" he asked, with equal politeness.

The Conference

"One whose name is writ in sand that the wind blows hither and thither," the other replied with a sudden affectation of sadness. "Ah! my lord, destiny owes me amends for much evil. Yet I do what I can because I have learned things in your beautiful Europe. Constantinople, Paris, are they not as the very portals of Paradise? And now, my lord, whither shall we go?"

"A little higher up, if it please you," said Kenneth, at a venture.

"Chisholm Bey is a climber," remarked the other, recovering his gaiety. "Let it be as you will."

He walked with the soft alertness of a cat, his keen, restless eyes noting everything, and, as it were, saying: "If you think to take me unawares, you're likely to find yourself grievously mistaken." Presently they came to a spot between two great rocks that offered the desired seclusion, and sat down facing each other on two flat stones, the right hand of each suggestively toying with the hilt of a pistol.

"You wonder at what has happened," said the Arab, by way of opening the conference.

"On the contrary," responded Kenneth, "I wonder at nothing."

"Ah!" said the other, with his unspeakable grin, "you have reached the summit of wisdom. He who has ceased to wonder has no more to learn."

"Was it to exchange compliments we came hither?" inquired Kenneth. "You have learned much in Europe and elsewhere, as I gather. Were it not well to put your learning to better use?"

The Arab shrugged his shoulders in the best French fashion.

"Who knows what is good and what is evil?" he returned. "My comrades and I follow our fortunes. My lord makes railways; we travel by them, and lo! they bring us to strange meeting places, even to Darel Hamra, and a conference with my lord Chisholm Bey."

Faces in the Mist

"Are the prisoners safe?" Kenneth demanded, abruptly.

"Safe as mice in cages."

"Do they suffer indignity or distress?"

"We are not in Cairo," replied the Arab, with a significant gesture; "neither are we in Paris. Darel Hamra is not a city full of pleasantness. But we take care of them; yes, we take care of them."

"How came they to be in your hands?"

The Arab laughed.

"In truth, they did not come to us by beckoning."

"That is, you captured them by craft, and bore them off by force?"

"Just a little craft, my lord, and a very little force. As they did not come to us by beckoning, neither did they go with us in gladness of heart. To say the truth, my lord, the lady was troublesome, clung to her companion, and would have made an outcry."

"So you prevented her," said Kenneth, grimly. He was looking very straight and hard at the Arab, an incipient fire in his eyes, though he had made a solemn compact with himself to avoid all show of feeling. His impulse was to draw and shoot the insolent knave. But that would only expose Pamela to further and graver perils, even were he quick enough to succeed.

"It was needful to keep silence, my lord," the Arab replied. "We silenced her by gentle prevention. The lady has suffered no wrong. Yet is my lord angry, and would tell me that the soldiers of the great Sultan are waiting yonder to take vengeance. Verily, I have seen them. Nevertheless, my lord will remember that he who pursues is one, and he who is pursued is another."

"Then," said Kenneth, seizing the chance, "you defy even the great Sultan. Forget not I am here his servant and friend."

The Conference

The Arab was silent a moment. "Listen," he said then, "I was afar in the Sultan's dominions. I was seized, and beaten, and robbed. I complained to the Sultan's servants and friends, bidding them tell their master. They laughed at me. Then I learned something which is a great thing, even this: that riches are to him who can take them. Touching this matter my comrades and I are not afraid. We have done what we have done."

"And your price for doing it?" inquired Kenneth, dropping back into the soft manner.

The Arab grew thoughtful, as if considering what reward were meet for such an achievement. At last, with the gravity of an Egyptian priest, he named his figure.

Kenneth pretended amazement, though, in fact, he felt none. "You would be rich at a bound," he returned. "That were money enough to buy half the camels in Arabia."

"And are not my lord's friends worth all the camels in Arabia many times over—yea, and much more?" was the grinning reply.

It was not Kenneth's cue to chaffer over figures. Fight a rogue with his own weapons is a shrewd principle in such negotiations, and Kenneth was following it. The Arab was watching him with an intent gaze, as if to read his thoughts and intentions in his face. And the reading seemed to be easy, for Kenneth was making his face a mirror, not a mask.

"Surely you are right," he agreed. "What were it to us if we had all the camels in Arabia multiplied an hundredfold and lost our friends? Take us to them that we may redeem them."

"Gladly would I obey my lord," returned the Arab with the utmost urbanity. "But as my lord is not alone in this matter, so neither am I. My comrades have made conditions. Ere they liberate

Faces in the Mist

their captives they must have gold. Think not I may persuade them to the contrary. They would sooner cut my throat than depart from their purpose." Kenneth put on an aggrieved look.

"Behold my disadvantage," he said. "I come here at your bidding, I dispute not concerning your ransom, I do all according to your wishes; yet you deny me this small boon."

"Blame me not, my lord," returned the Arab, with a fine air of regret. "What am I against so many, or what argument is strong enough to turn aside the sharp edge of steel when it is laid to one's throat?"

Kenneth seemed to consider. "But how shall I know that when the gold is delivered into your hands, my friends shall be delivered into mine?" he asked.

"I give you assurance," replied the Arab, with great alacrity. "Trust me, my lord."

He was gloating over a victory so easily won. He had expected protests, delays, haggings—was, in fact, prepared for them—prepared even to reduce his terms, and lo! immediate agreement. It seemed he had played a more fortunate stroke than he guessed. His greed and impatience overcoming his discretion, blinded him to any suspicion that perhaps the other side was too ready, too compliant. He who does not mean to pay may well be liberal in making terms.

"But if on a chance disagreement your comrades would cut your throat, my trust might avail me nothing," said Kenneth, as if pondering the matter.

"Ah! forget not the gold," responded the Arab; "the magician gold, the true genie, the wonder-worker that persuades when eloquent tongues fail, yea, and performs miracles. When I go to them, saying: 'Ye children of Belial, behold the gold,' then will they rejoice and release your friends, whom I will myself deliver safely into your hands. Not so much as a hair of their head shall be injured. Has my lord

The Conference

brought the gold ? " he asked, making as if to reach for it.

" I am not a wizard," returned Kenneth. " How could I know what was wanted ? "

The Arab's face fell at that ; but next moment lighted up again. " My lord will bring the gold ? " he said, with an avaricious gleam. Again Kenneth was all agreement.

" Assuredly," he answered. " But where shall I bring it, and to whom ? "

" To whom but to me, and what better place than here ? " replied the Arab, feeling almost as if his fingers were already on the coveted wealth.

" Nay ; but let it be delivered in presence of the captives, that they may see their deliverance and rejoice," rejoined Kenneth.

The crafty look that for an instant had left the Arab's face, came back. There must be no ruses, no stealthy flank surprise.

" Why does my lord still doubt ? " he asked, insinuatingly. " He would win the lady back speedily. I show him the way. Ah ! my lord, she is indeed exceeding fair, and above all price. To be her lover were to be admitted to the bliss of Paradise before one's time. Go, my lord ; go and bring the gold, that her heart and thine may be made glad."

The rogue grinned broadly as he spoke. Kenneth could have taken and flung him to the gorge below ; but in spite of a surging resentment, he smiled back.

" She is indeed fair," he owned, " and worth many ransoms. To-night, when the sun sets, meet me here."

" Nay, let it be when the moon rises, that we may behold each other's gladness," returned the Arab. And once more Kenneth agreed.

With that both men rose, and bowing elaborately to each other, went their separate ways.

CHAPTER XXI

A DIPLOMATIC ENCOUNTER

UNABLE to restrain themselves, Kenneth's friends ran out to meet him.

"Well?" said Mr. Fairhurst, his tense, white face belying the American reputation for imperturbability.

"Again what we expected," was the reply. "The condition is that money be brought here at moonrise, and delivered to the ruffian with whom I have just had the honour to confer."

He named the sum demanded. Carew whistled in sheer astonishment.

"By Jimminy," he cried; "they don't need any lessons in extortion. Think, I suppose, they have got hold of a mighty good thing."

"When one sets up as a brigand one may as well do things on the grand scale," remarked Kenneth.

"Their shrewdness tells them they have made a lucky catch, and they are making the most of their luck."

"You have agreed to their terms?" put in Mr. Fairhurst, to whom money was the least important of considerations just then.

"I suppose I gave the impression of agreeing," Kenneth replied. "But, as a matter of fact, I neither agreed nor refused. One good item of intelligence I gleaned—though held fast, the captives are safe."

"Thank God," exclaimed Mr. Fairhurst, with a breath that shook him from crown to heel. "Have you been able to get any idea where they are?"

"Unfortunately, not the least. But I don't think

A Diplomatic Encounter

they're far off. As you may guess, this place abounds in caves and clefts and secluded nooks. They're kept in some of these—very likely almost within sound of our voices."

"We're armed," said Carew, truculently. "Suppose we cook these brigands, and serve 'em up with a little of their own sauce?"

Carew was for instant vengeance; but Kenneth, who knew more of Eastern ways, shook his head.

"To attempt reprisals just at present would be almost the unwise thing we could do," he said.

"We must think of other means of rescue."

"I reckon we'd better see about raising the money," observed Mr. Fairhurst. "That appears to be the likeliest way to what we want. Of course, we haven't got anything like enough with us. I may have to cable to London for a remittance, through Damascus agents, and have it sent down here by train."

"Will you let that stand over for a little, sir?" Kenneth asked. "I may have a suggestion to make presently. Now, I think our first duty is to Mrs. Fairhurst. She must be getting nervous over our long absence, and I am afraid will be sorely disappointed with the result."

She was. They found her on the verge of hysterics; but, happily, her very fears, coupled with a distracted longing for news, kept her up.

Leaving her to the tender ministrations of her husband and son, Kenneth requested the officer to have the men dismissed. That done, he slipped off, and shut himself in an empty room at the station, to think out some new ideas that had occurred to him. As an engineer he had worked out some intricate problems; but this was the hardest bit of engineering he had ever done in his life.

"I am not to be disturbed on any account," he told a staring official. "If anybody tries it, shoot him."

Faces in the Mist

At the end of an hour he walked out again, his face grim and purposeful, and went straight to call on his friend Abdullah. The great man was obviously surprised, but effusively cordial, and overflowing with sympathy.

"A rug and cushion for my lord, thou base slave," he ordered, peremptorily. And when Kenneth was seated: "I have heard the dread news, my lord; yea, my heart is rent with grief and concern. Has my lord any tidings of his missing friends?"

"Yes," Kenneth answered, quietly. "Robbers have captured them, and now set a great price on their heads."

"Oh, the villainy of man, the villainy of man!" cried Abdullah, aghast at such an outrage. "My lord astounds me. I have no speech for the wickedness that walks abroad."

"It runs," said Kenneth, keeping his eyes fast on Abdullah's face.

"Yea, truly mayest thou say so," agreed the Sheik, in horror-stricken tones. "The evil one is never at rest, never ceases in working wickedness. But as thou knowest, my lord, I feared; yea, I warned thee, though thou would'st not hearken, being great in thy courage. Who are the robbers? Who are the men so full of insolence that they seize and carry off the friends of Chisholm Bey?"

"Touching that," replied Kenneth, in a curiously even voice, "I have somewhat to say that I would not have the winds carry forth. Can we speak together in private?"

"Yea, surely," answered Abdullah, with alacrity. "Mouth to ear, heart to heart, if thou would'st have it so. What is sweeter than the voice of a friend speaking privately? Naught, naught save perchance the hours of Paradise, whereof the Prophet has not yet granted me knowledge. Forth from my sight,"

A Diplomatic Encounter

he told his retinue. "Let not one of you remain, and see ye that the doors are shut fast and the curtains drawn close. And thou," he told a member of his body-guard, "stand without, but beyond ear-shot; if so much as the whisper of a whisper reaches thee, thy life shall pay for thy disobedience. If any man come seeking to enter, forbid him. If he refuse to heed, draw thy sword and smite. His blood be upon his own perverse head."

Having bowed to the ground they glided away, silent as ghosts, and with a scarcely audible rustle drew the thick curtains behind them.

"Behold, they are gone," said Abdullah, with a sultry smile. "We are as secret as the Prophet in his tomb. What would my lord say?"

"I am in deep fear lest tidings of this thing reach the great Sultan," responded Kenneth, with well-feigned concern. "For then would he put all Darel Hamra to the sword; yea, he would water the desert with blood; for, as thou knowest, he has sworn to protect and avenge his friends and servants, the makers of the Sacred Railway, if they be injured or molested."

Only a trained and acute observer would have noticed the tiny twitching of Abdullah's eyelids, as Kenneth made this statement.

"Has my lord found out who the robbers are?" he asked.

"That is my present business," returned Kenneth, deliberately. "I am come to find out."

Abdullah made a pretence of lifting his eyebrows in amazement.

"Nay," he smiled; "but I think my lord has come to jest."

"My thoughts are far from jesting," rejoined Kenneth. "As I live, I am come to find out."

"Dost thou mistake me for a wizard?" said Abdullah. "How shall I tell thee?"

Faces in the Mist

"Are not all at Darel Hamra thy servants?" inquired Kenneth, sweetly. "Their comings and their goings are known to thee. For behold, art thou not the eyes, and ears, and hands of our great lord, the Sultan?"

"Mayhap, mayhap," said Abdullah, thrown off his guard by the subtle flattery. Next moment he had cause to repent.

"Wherefore," pursued Kenneth, blandly, "having given thee power, he will send, requiring my absent and injured friends at thy hand."

Abdullah saw his mistake, and cunningly tried to retrieve it.

"Nay, but I have no power over robbers," he protested; "neither do they come to me, saying: 'Such and such are our names, and such and such are our evil purposes. Take thou note of them.' That is not their method, as my lord and the great Sultan know."

"Nevertheless, he will require my lost friends at thy hand," insisted Kenneth.

"But if I know nothing of the matter?" exclaimed the Sheik, a quick fear springing up within him.

"Our lord the Sultan is full of wisdom," remarked Kenneth, meaningly. "Perchance he will ask thee this question: 'Have all thy fellows as little knowledge as thyself?' He may inquire that of thee."

"Do I hold the minds and thoughts of my fellows in my hand?" said Abdullah, growing more and more uneasy.

"Are they not subject to thee?" was the rejoinder. "When men under my authority on the Sacred Railway commit iniquity, I have them sought out and punished."

"My lord talks as if the robbers were in my service," said Abdullah, prepared to resent any aspersion or suspicion of guilt.

A Diplomatic Encounter

"Wert thou to number thy men this minute," returned Kenneth, significantly, "perchance some would be absent who ought to be present. But I would keep all whispers of that from our dread lord, the Sultan. I am thy friend. Therefore am I come to turn aside this danger. Let us consider together."

"Am I not my lord's servant?" responded Abdullah, with a subtle air of humouring a mistaken and troublesome person.

He settled himself into Oriental passivity. But Kenneth came not to bring repose. Another minute had not passed when Abdullah's narrow eyes were shining, not in geniality; next he was wriggling like an impaled eel; then he tried a look of indignant denial, for with perilous audacity Kenneth was pouring out truth, hot and scalding.

"I put to thee what an enemy may aver," he said. "Think of the Sultan hearkening to such words, asking thee for proof of innocence, and thou not able to give it."

Then suddenly manner and matter changed. Abdullah leaned forward, holding his breath, and scarcely able to credit his ears. Ah! Chisholm Bey was cunning and not to be deceived. What a mind for acuteness, what an eye for crookedness! Abdullah could not guess how he discovered certain things that were thought to be well hidden. But praise be the Prophet, he was not unreasonable. On the contrary, he had the most captivating scheme of recompense.

Kenneth, in fact, probing at a venture, had found his man, the aboriginal Adam, full of guile and ready to play traitor—for a consideration. Upon that he played with a skill that was not to be resisted. Smiling, gloating, Abdullah slid forward inch by inch, till at last he was off his gorgeous cushion. His breath

Faces in the Mist

came short and quick, his face shone. He was as a man charmed, under a spell.

"My lord," he cried at last, in a burst of pure admiration, "thou art great; thou should'st have been one of us."

Kenneth smiled appreciatively. "To-night," he remarked simply.

"To-night, when the sun seeks his bed in the West," returned the beaming Abdullah. "Now may the slaves return. After this great thing my lord must have refreshment."

CHAPTER XXII

WOLVES AND PANTHERS

THE day wore on in a dragging agony of suspense. Mrs. Fairhurst, almost wringing her fingers off, wept, upbraided, accused, slept from sheer exhaustion in a darkened room, to the fanning of a maid, and awoke invigorated to resume her plaint. Why had they come here? Why had they not heeded her in time? They might have known that an acquaintance begun in ill-luck, and continued in worse, must culminate in tragedy. Appreciating a mother's feeling in such a crisis, Kenneth bowed his head as before a hurricane of pelting hail, and his very meekness and forbearance exasperated her.

"Can't you do something?" she demanded, frenzied by what seemed intentional delay meant to torture her. And when the need of a little patience was suggested, she cried out: "Patience, patience; we have had too much patience. Rube, Carew, can't *you* go and find Pam and Lord Benbreck? If I were only a man——"

Breath failed her to state what would happen if she were a man.

In spite of his own anxiety, and the unjust, embittered humour of others, Kenneth was wondrously composed. At times he actually appeared to be happy. To Mrs. Fairhurst it was proof stronger than Holy Writ of his callousness. In the crisis of her fate he could smile. Then a darker thought flashed across her mind. He had been slighted.

Faces in the Mist

What if he were taking his revenge, if the whole trouble were of his planning? She remembered having heard that Highlanders were vindictive, quick to take offence, slow to forgive, ruthless in retaliation. Yes, it might all be a diabolically contrived revenge, to lure them into the wilderness, and gratify himself thus. Could malevolence go further? In this fierce conviction she might have accused him openly but for the timely intervention of her husband.

"Chisholm's all right, Susannah," he assured her, "and as straight as sunlight. Don't you go worrying about dark designs that were never thought of and don't exist."

"He's all wrong," was the bitter retort. "And what's more, we'll be all wrong till we get rid of him, if ever we can be right now. I am surprised, Rube, that a cute American like you allows him to take you in. It was a bad day for us when we first set eyes on him. What made Pam go and get lost in that mist and meet him, anyway?"

"Some people might say it was destiny," was the response; "but that's talking high. Let's call it chance. And now, Susannah, you must promise me not to break out on him till this thing is over. After that perhaps you won't want to."

"I'll try, Rube, I'll try," answered Mrs. Fairhurst. "But it's not easy; for I am just bursting to have it out." In moments of high feeling Mrs. Fairhurst unwittingly returned to the language of her youth, which was not of the polished order she affected in the days of her wealth, the blaze of her glory.

"You'll be glad afterwards if you don't," remarked Mr. Fairhurst, soothingly. "It's a mighty bad plan to let out everything that's in, a mighty bad plan. If I'd done that, Susannah, I'd have been ruined twenty times over."

Carew was as impatient as his mother, though

Wolves and Panthers

in a different way. But when he proposed a punitive expedition, Kenneth again demurred.

"Until Miss Fairhurst is safe," he said, "there must be no thought of punishment. Just for the moment her captors are masters of the situation, and we must appear to humour them." And then, turning with great earnestness to Mr. Fairhurst, he added, "I have thought out a little plan, sir; will you leave it to me?"

"Certainly, certainly," was the frank answer; "absolutely and entirely. We are in your hands, Mr. Chisholm. Only you'll get to work with as little delay as possible?"

"Not a moment shall be lost when the time comes to act," Kenneth told him fervently. "Trust me for that, too."

Kenneth was taciturn, and, as it seemed, mysterious, regarding his plan. He said nothing of his interview with Abdullah, gave no hint of the manner in which he meant to proceed. But when evening drew near, he had a private interview with Mr. Fairhurst.

"Our excursion is not turning out as I planned," he said. "It is needless to enlarge on my regret. Mrs. Fairhurst blames me. I can understand, for I have a mother myself."

"That's generous of you," Mr. Fairhurst returned warmly.

"Not generous, only just," said Kenneth. "If we all had simple justice in this world most of us could dispense with what is called generosity. Mrs. Fairhurst is distracted by fear and anxiety. But it was not of that I meant to speak. To-night I am going out again, and, please God, I will restore Miss Fairhurst to you safe and well."

"Please God it may be so. My son and I go with you, of course."

"No; if you don't mind, I should prefer not."

Faces in the Mist

Mrs. Fairhurst will need your attention in the ordeal of suspense, and there are other reasons. I have my own plans for seeing this through. All I ask you is to trust me to do my best, and not to worry if I am a little longer in returning than you expect."

"Do you go out on a forlorn hope?" Mr. Fairhurst asked, catching his breath a little. The affair was telling even on his steel nerves.

"I decline to call it that," returned Kenneth, "though of course there are risks; but I may say one thing, Mr. Fairhurst. For once in my life I am going to take the Spartan mother's advice to her son. I will come back with my shield or on it. If the latter, you'll not blame me too much, nor think unkindly of me?"

Mr. Fairhurst gripped his hand and wrung it with unconscious vigour.

"You are a brave man, Mr. Chisholm," he said, in his direct and simple way.

"Just at present I feel myself considerably more fool than hero," responded Kenneth, "but I will do my best."

"And that involves everything," said Mr. Fairhurst, "your reputation, your prospects, even your life. The biggest hero cannot do more than that, I reckon."

"I like to do my duty, if I can," said Kenneth, quietly. "I have communicated with my chief in Damascus. He has some little regard for me, I think, and—and if anything happens, he will see to my affairs. But I hope and believe all will be well. What I ask now is that you let me vanish for a while, and not worry over my absence."

When night fell suddenly as a pall dropped from the sky, a company of silent men slipped out and away to the rocky buttresses of Darel Hamra. Mr. Fairhurst saw them off secretly and furtively, then rejoined his wife and son to fortify them in the

Wolves and Panthers

cruel ordeal of waiting. Kenneth headed the outgoing band, a light, lithe figure, so ardent in his haste that the men, chosen by himself for proved hardihood, could scarcely maintain the pace. In the manner of his going there was neither uncertainty nor hesitation. He knew what he wanted—knew, too, where it was to be found, thanks to his own daring and the self-blinding avarice of Abdullah.

While the company advanced, noiselessly as leopards and almost as swift, the after-flush of sunset cast a fiery radiance on the crags in front. For a little these glowed as with a fierce internal heat, so that the beholders would scarcely have been surprised to see the solid rock bursting into flame. It was a gorgeous sight; a flood of living colour poured across intervening mountain tops, which here and there caught the glory and blazed like beacon-fires. Then suddenly the blaze was extinguished, the red died out, and only a mountain of black loomed before the hastening band. Near the foot of that mountain they halted, and two of their number, desert-born and keen of sense as tigers, dropped flat and put their ears to the ground.

"Nothing moves," they announced, after a minute of intense listening; and certainly it seemed the darkness and silence held a breathless, stifled world between them. Kenneth gave final caution to his followers.

"Ye are sure your feet are all silent?" he asked in a low voice.

"As the paw of a wolf when it treads on fine sand," was the whispered answer. "We have seen to it that our sandals have neither wood nor iron to strike the stones and betray us. They are leather, soft to the foot as a kid's skin, and bound with thongs."

"There is need of silence," said Kenneth. "In very truth our going must be as the wolf's when it

Faces in the Mist

treads on fine sand. For we go to take foxes unawares—yea, to deliver their prey out of the mouths of wolves, and to climb like panthers."

"Fear not, my lord, it shall be done," one replied, confidently, speaking for his fellows. Kenneth smiled in approval. He knew his men; they had served him well before to-night.

They went on again, less swiftly, more cautiously, guided by instinct rather than vision; for the blackness seemed to thicken, and the heat was as the breath of an oven. Nevertheless, they went straight in the appointed direction. Inside a gorge they halted once more, and again the desert-born twain put their ears to the ground. There was no movement of beast or bird or man; even the wind was asleep.

"Thus far our secrecy has brought us in safety," Kenneth observed, with a gusty breath that betrayed his tension. "But we have been as pleasure-takers walking in a garden of lilies. Now our task begins to grow hard."

"Are we women, my lord, to turn aside or fly in fear?" one asked, his courage mounting at thought of the reward to be won.

"Let the event speak for us," Kenneth returned. "Better a deed done than a hundred eloquent words. Is the world become an oven?" he added, mopping his streaming face. "Surely I smell thunder."

Almost as he spoke the lightning flashed and the crash of the thunder came, so near that it seemed to be shattering the crags over their heads.

"This is unlucky," Kenneth commented, as though to himself. "The lightning will reveal us to our enemies."

"And also reveal our enemies to us," he was told.

"True, true," he owned, quickly. "Only now we must be doubly wary. Keep your weapons ready, but use them not without my order."

Wolves and Panthers

There was no need to await the rising of the moon, supposing the moon would show herself in face of such a blinding glare. For reasons of strategy they were to divide here, and Kenneth spoke a word to the leader of the second party, one of Abdullah's chief men.

"See thou fail not in this thing," he said. "Thou knowest the penalty."

"Truly, my lord: a carcase to the birds of the air for a feast."

"Thou has spoken aright," said Kenneth, grimly. "Only forget not the reward. Forward, and take heed to thy going and to thy doing. Be brave and of good discretion. Make the great Sultan proud of thee."

The other saluted, and led off his little company. At the same time Kenneth turned sharply in another direction with the half-dozen men who were to accompany him. They felt their way through cleft and chasm, now crouching, now making a bolt from point to point, and always closed in by great walls of rock that often seemed to meet above them. One man, properly placed, might have ambushed and slain the lot; but fortunately he didn't.

By-and-by, blinded by lightning, lashed by deluging rain, they began to climb what appeared to be a sheer cliff, every heart among them beating tumultuously from exertion and excitement. The lightning, which was almost continuous, showed them zigzagging like half-drowned ants across the face of the rock. But like ants they persevered, and presently reached the top, drenched as much by sweat as rain. There they lay down a moment for a last whispered consultation.

"Ye see the place?" Kenneth asked.

"Yea, we see it."

"And ye know what ye are to do?"

Faces in the Mist

"Yea, yea, we know."

"And ye will not forget the signal?"

"Nay; be assured, my lord, we will not forget." The occasion was one for brevity of speech and quickness of action.

"Be of good cheer, then, and Heaven reward us all as we deserve," said Kenneth, breathing deeply.

With that he left them, slipping back as he came, and leaving many tokens of himself in the form of rags and tags of clothing. But he was not at all concerned with that. Neither did he give a thought to his bleeding hands and feet, which suffered even more cruelly than his clothes. Through the glare of the lightning a familiar face rose before him; through the crashing of the thunder he heard a familiar voice. The face was white with terror; the voice called for aid, urging him to haste. "I am coming; I am coming," his heart thumped madly in response.

He thought if he failed to what terrible fate the owner of the face and voice might come, and he made desperate speed over boulders and round rocks. The thunder became as a menace of doom in his ears, the lightning a lurid torch, giving him one chance against a million. "I am coming, I am coming," his heart repeated with a choking vehemence. Then he stopped panting, at the discovery that he had reached the path to his trysting-place above.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW THE TRYST WAS KEPT

To get his men properly placed and hidden he was obliged to make a double ascent, first by a round-about hazardous route from the rear; and now from the front by the way he would be expected to take. The secret disposition of his men was a delicate and trying task, for it was hard to evade the Bedouin scouts; but he had succeeded, and now, after a side-splitting race, he was almost ready for the tryst with his affable friend, who was to receive the money. He scrambled up, suffering more wounds and contusions, and reached the top like a spent runner with a bursting pain at his ribs. A moment he panted, a hand pressed to each side, then strode forward and stood up in the flashing light.

"My lord is faithful," said a figure that rose promptly before him; "and like myself, has not awaited the coming of the moon."

"What need?" returned Kenneth, feeling a trifle giddy.

"Surely none," was the response. "Have we not more light than ten moons shining with all their might could give us? But never was my poor head so beset by thunder. As for the rain, it is as if the heavens were open and an ocean of water emptied out on the earth beneath. On such a night did Noah take refuge in his ark. If we haste not, we shall need one. My lord has brought the money?"

"Wherefore should I come if not with money?" replied Kenneth, now breathed a little and cool with

Faces in the Mist

the need of action. The lightning showed him fingering gold.

"I will come for it," said the Arab, in a gulping passion of greed to clutch the chinking coin.

"Nay; but having come so far, I will complete my journey," returned Kenneth, politely. "I will bring it to thee in fulfilment of my word."

Only a few yards separated them. As Kenneth stepped forward there was a momentary blackness. The next flash showed the Arab leaning forward, the gleam of a ravenous beast in his eyes. Then another momentary blackness hid him. When the light came again he was lying face down across a boulder. Rolling off, he turned as he fell, and lay stark, the rain beating on his upturned face. He had not come alone, however, and as he went down half-a-dozen desperate men sprang to avenge him. But this was precisely what Kenneth had provided for, and, quick as the flashes that lighted them on, his men were upon the robbers. About the unconscious figure a fierce, swirling fight ensued. A gun was fired to give the alarm, but a thunder-peal drowned its report, and there was no opportunity to fire a second. The man who had fired went headlong into a chasm below; then one of his comrades followed him. A third and a fourth were laid out beside their leader, and the others, finding the game up, vanished as quickly as they had appeared. The surprise was well-planned and gallantly accomplished.

"Bravely, bravely," panted Kenneth. "Any wounds?"

One man scooped up a handful of rain-water to wash blood from his face; another ripped his sash to bind an arm; Kenneth himself bled freely at the shoulder. But who thinks of such trifles in such a moment?

"Take this man away," Kenneth ordered, pointing

How the Tryst was Kept

to the leader, who was beginning to show signs of returning consciousness. Thereupon two men, seizing him by the legs, began to drag him off, bumping his head without compunction.

"Gently, brothers, gently," Kenneth pleaded. "Though he deserve not Paradise, leave not his brains spattered on the rocks. We have other uses for him. Only take care that he revive not suddenly and regain the use of his legs. And now," he went on, addressing one who stood close beside him, "it is time for thee to do thy part."

"Behold, I am ready, my lord," was the blithe answer.

"Lead on, then," said Kenneth; "and as thou valuest thy life, see to it thou lead not falsely."

"And are we to be left behind?" cried the two who held the brigand leader. "We will kill this fellow, and come also." What was a casual human life to stand between them and prize-money? Kenneth thought a moment.

"Nay, we must not kill him," he replied then. "Carry him down to a secret place, and there leave him securely bound till we have time to return and deal with him."

"His craft is exceeding great, my lord," one rejoined. "He may revive, break his bonds, and escape. Let us take him aside and slay him."

But though that would be an effectual provision against the chance of escape, Kenneth could by no means consent. So the man was taken to a recess in a gorge below, disarmed and bound. He woke up during the process, asking dazedly where he was, and what they were doing with him.

"Making thee snug here lest thou wander and harm thyself," he was answered, with a rough laugh. "Some day perchance thou wilt reach Paradise. Meanwhile be still."

Faces in the Mist

He pulled himself together with a start of fear. "Ye are binding me," he said. "Tell me wherefore, brothers?"

"For thy safe keeping, lest thou return to the ways of iniquity, O saintly one," he was told in the same rough manner. "Content thyself, for now art thou permitted to meditate on things to come. Thou art to have what thou deservdst—a blessing for which thou shouldst be thankful. Be at peace."

Taking his weapons they hastened after their companions, speculating as they went, for great things were afoot. Otherwise would Chisholm Bey be out on such a night?

It was indeed a night to making ordinary mortals cower in bed. Within those gorges the din seemed less the rolling of thunder than the crashing of splintered rocks, exploded and torn from their foundations, while the fitful glare was as the flames of a million furnaces belching in awful splendour out of the black bosom of the night. The rain was a deluge. What an hour before had been dry, dusty gullies, were now sweeping torrents or eddying pools.

"If this continues we shall have to swim for it," thought Kenneth, wading knee deep. He was soused, but that mattered nothing; and his companions minded a sousing as little as he. They were grim men bent on grim business, fired by the spirit of adventure, and yet more by the lust of gain.

They pushed on, now almost carried off their feet by the foaming torrent, now tripping and clutching at one another, deafened, blinded, but resolute and wary as invaders in an enemy's country. At any moment a bullet might sing through the crash of the thunder or a spear glint in the flash of lightning.

Progress was rapid, though to Kenneth in his frantic impatience it seemed the pace of snails. Those who

How the Tryst was Kept

escaped from the fight above might get in first, and then the end would be worse than the beginning. Again and again the white face broke on his vision and the terror-stricken voice sounded in his ears, making him sweat in anguish. Yet he was perfectly cool: had every alert sense perfectly under control.

As a measure of precaution he took his guide's arm, resolved that in case of treachery the man should die without explanations. At last they halted at a sharp angle where two defiles crossed, and the guide, craning his head, looked expectantly right and left. Immediately a man slipped from between two rocks, crept forward and spoke earnestly and quietly.

"All is ready awaiting my lord's signal," he announced.

"And the robbers?" asked Kenneth, his heart standing still.

"Watching their captives and looking for their comrades with the money," the man answered, with a grin. All at once he stooped double, moved forward a pace or two peering cautiously, and then turning, beckoned Kenneth.

"Behold! my lord," he said, pointing down the lurid vista of the cross defile. "Seest thou anything?"

"I see the gleam of a weapon," Kenneth answered, thrilling through and through.

"Then thou seest where thy friends are held," said the man. "If thou wert to shout well between the thunder peals they would hear thee."

"But how are we to take the robbers by surprise?" Kenneth asked, a choking sensation in throat and chest. "They will see us coming."

The man doubled back like an eel and pointed to a passage in the wall of rock just wide enough to admit a man if he did not object to some squeezing.

"It winds through almost to the mouth of the cave,"

Faces in the Mist

he intimated. "My lord thinks it is guarded. So it would be did greed and certainty not make the robbers careless. Some, as thou knowest, went to get the money from thee. The others who remained are taking shelter from the storm and counting their share of the spoil ere it comes to them. I have been through the passage from end to end."

Kenneth's heart was beating a triple stroke; but his brain was as if packed in ice.

"We had a little tussle with the enemy on the top," he said; "some we secured, but one or two escaped us, and I feared they might be here first to give warning; but they may come even while we talk. Back to thy comrades with thy best speed; and when ye see me leap out into the open, then leap ye also, and quit you like men."

The man slipped off like a lizard amongst the rocks, and Kenneth led his companions by the path cleft as by the stroke of a giant clean through the heart of the rock. Reaching the end, he peered out and saw a sight that for one moment froze his blood. Down the gorge but a short distance off came a man running swiftly in spite of lameness, and behind him followed another. A minute more and the alarm would be given.

"They come; be ready," Kenneth told his men, glancing behind. Then he drew in his breath to steady himself, half crouching with an expression of extraordinary liveness and energy. Thus he held himself poised for half a minute. Then, quick as the flash that revealed his mark, he leaped forth, and the runner went down with a sharp cry.

Instantly there was a shouting and a crackling of musketry in front. In another minute blades were clashing in a hand-to-hand fight. The surprised brigands fought like wild beasts at bay, beasts that had at once to defend themselves and hold their prey.

How the Tryst was Kept

The attackers manœuvred to get behind them, but the movement was detected, and with fierce cries and maledictions the bandits threw themselves inwards. The fight thus swayed and swirled round the cave mouth, giving Kenneth a glimpse within. All that he could make out in the cavernous blackness, however, was the low flickering of a dying fire.

But all at once his eye caught two ruffians making a dash inside, with what intent his heart told him. Like a spasm of fire the spirit of warrior ancestors leaped along nerve and vein. He tore after the men; one turned and went down, and Kenneth stumbled over him in pursuit of the other, who disappeared into a recess. There was a wild scream. Kenneth made blindly in its direction, found his man and settled him. The next instant a figure rushed out of the blackness behind—Pamela! Her hair was tumbled and wild, her face as revealed in the weird red light was stricken with terror, yet as if by magic over the terror there spread a look of inexpressible joy. She ran to Kenneth, her hands outstretched, and he met her more than half way.

"Thank God you have come," she cried, almost fainting. "I knew you would. I prayed for you to come."

His arms were tight about her. For one delirious moment her heart beat tumultuously against his, and the noise of thunder, the clash of blades, the hoarse shouts of fierce men died remotely away. She clung and nestled as if feeling secure in his strength. But the next moment she drew herself up, flinging back the luxuriant veil of hair with a toss of her head.

"I can shoot," she said, and quietly took a pistol from his belt. He smiled at her.

"You are an inspiration to faltering hearts," he told her. "Please keep close to me."

Faces in the Mist

"I will," she answered. "I will keep close to you, or—or die!"

A surging roar and clatter rose at the cave mouth, for the robbers, seeing what had happened, were pressing furiously in. Kenneth turned quickly half round, his arm still about Pamela, and thus standing together they faced their enemies.

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CHAPTER XXIV

PAMELA'S VALOUR

THE name and fame of Chisholm Bey stood well to them then. Kenneth faced the fiends that beset him as bravely as man could, and she who stood beside him was not less brave than he. But all their valour would have availed them little but for the lion-like courage of those who fought with them.

The brigands, well knowing where the prize lay, bent all their fury on keeping, or rather on recovering, possession of Pamela. They drove in, therefore, with a ferocity that counted murder a light thing. But there drove at their backs, hewing and slashing, fighters as fell of purpose and stout of arm as themselves. In the joy and ardour of battle, and the yet greater joy and ardour of devotion to their leader, Kenneth's men were, indeed, forgetting all mercenary motives. It was Chisholm Bey they were saving, their friend, their protector on many an occasion, the man who had asked them to take no hazard he would not gladly take himself. The magic of his personality was upon them, doubling their courage, trebling their strength of arm.

The brigands, turning at the onslaught with savage oaths and livid faces, made yet more livid by the lightning, smote frantically. Seizing his chance in the gory confusion, Kenneth snatched Pamela and

Faces in the Mist

tried to cut his way out. Certain of the brigands, detecting his intention, flung themselves upon him, but before they could strike others were upon them in turn.

Remembering his injunction, Pamela kept close to him, careful, however, in no wise to hamper his movements, and ever watching to give what aid she could. Now that he was beside her she was miraculously cool and brave, quick to see, and prompt to take advantage of every opportunity. None could, in truth, be more unlike the rose-water maiden, ever ready to faint at the sight of hostile weapons and running blood.

Suddenly, in the midst of the fray, Kenneth plucked at her as if he would lift and carry her off. "Come," he said; "come."

Between two flashes of lightning they managed to get out, slip round a corner, and into another and narrower chasm. Pamela was palpitating like a newly-caught bird; yet she was thinking very little of herself.

"What of your men?" she asked, as though loth to go.

"The present business is to save you," was the answer. "My men will take care of themselves, and, what's more, try to keep the enemy engaged. Come, come quickly."

They ran on, splashing and stumbling, Kenneth doing his best to assist his companion. But, in truth, she needed little assistance. Presently they paused to take breath and harken, if harkening were possible in the ceaseless crashing of thunder. As they listened Kenneth remembered Benbreck, and asked where he was.

"I have not seen him for twelve hours," Pamela replied. "There are two caves, one on each side of the ravine. He was kept in one; I was in the other."



"THUS STANDING TOGETHER THEY FACED THEIR ENEMIES."

Pamela's Valour

"So you were separated," said Kenneth. "Did they treat you badly?"

"We hadn't all home comforts, exactly," she answered, with a little smile, "but in the circumstances I suppose we weren't really badly treated."

"If I thought you were," said Kenneth, from between set teeth, "as I live I'd go back even now, and have them wiped out."

She clung to him in a new terror, the terror of losing him. "You won't go back," she pleaded. "No matter how they treated me, you mustn't go back now. What's that?" she asked suddenly, holding her breath. In a lull of the storm they heard men shouting.

"They're on our trail," he said. "They've missed us, and are coming. Quick, quick!"

As he spoke he swung her aside as though she were but a feather, there being no time for ceremony, even were there thoughts of it. By a stroke of luck they stopped close to a deep crevice in the rock, partly hidden by an overlapping edge. Into this he thrust her, gently, but strongly, and squeezed himself also into the opening, resolved to protect her with his life.

"Now will you give me your revolver?" he said. Without a word she put it into his hand, and so, doubly armed, he awaited what was to come.

They stood thus for an eternity of some two minutes. The shouting came nearer, receded, came again, this time quite closely. Then three men, their hair in their eyes, advanced at a run, looking right and left and sniffing like hounds. Kenneth peered out, then spoke quietly over his shoulder: "If they see us there is nothing left for me but to kill them—if I can." Never before had he known this calm, fixed ferocity of purpose.

"And if you fail?" she asked, her mouth very close to his ear.

Faces in the Mist

"Then of course they will kill me," he answered.

"In that case I will die with you," she said. The terrible words were spoken without any symptom of shrinking or fear; nay, as it seemed to the sole hearer, with a certain note of exultation. Fear had indeed departed. There are moments when it seems a supremely good thing to die. Such a moment had come to Pamela. If he were to die, why shouldn't she? The great thing was that they should die together, and she resolved that in case of the worst it should be so.

"Before anything happens," he said, breaking in on her thoughts, "I ask your forgiveness."

"For what?" she demanded, almost brusquely.

"First, for bringing you into this horrible plight; and next, for—for everything else."

"If there's to be penitence, I'm the one that should be on my knees," was the response. "But don't make me sorry now. I want to be glad."

She leaned forward till her chin was on his shoulder and her cheek almost touching his.

"You have done it all for me," she went on. "Why should we talk of forgiveness? You are very brave; all I want is the chance to be brave with you."

He could feel the throb of her bosom quicken as she spoke. And as if fearing he did not understand, she leaned yet a little further forward. He turned his head half round; her eye-lashes brushed his cheek, he felt her breath warm upon him, and there went through him the mystic thrill which a man's heart never mistakes. But there was no time to heed the sensation nor think what it signified.

The storm was abating somewhat, making the intervals of darkness perceptibly longer, giving the refugees more time to breathe. A few feet off the crevice where they hid the pursuers stopped.

"The Prophet's curse be upon them!" said one.

Pamela's Valour

"Everything is against us. Even the lightning is failing."

"Make thine eyes the sharper, then," retorted another. "They must be found. Are we to fight and bleed in vain?"

"It was folly to turn from them to the others and so let them escape," said the third. "The man matters not, but the woman, by the lovely Fatima, there is our prize. Therefore must she be retaken."

One of them, searching and nosing like a terrier, suddenly stepped aside as if he had discovered his quarry. The breath was held in Kenneth's breast as a man holds it at the touch of Death. He did not so much as wink. It seemed that he could not move, that the pursuers had but to put out a hand and pluck him from his hiding. And his companion was as still, as rigid as he.

A minute wore on, a minute that was as countless ages. The searcher turned away, returned, peered right and left, looking once straight, as it appeared, into the hiding place. Kenneth's right hand quivered and shook; his head hummed; a million fireflies danced before his eyes. A second more and he must shoot from sheer inability to refrain. If only he got them in a row one behind the other, so that a single bullet would drive through the lot!

"Satan must aid them," growled the seeker, with an oath of disgust, and began to splash forward.

"They shall pay the dearer when we catch them," growled the others in return, and followed their leader. The pair in hiding drew breath together.

"A near squeak," said Kenneth. "They will be back. We must get out of this at once. Can you climb?"

She was ready for any hazard; but where could they climb? The precipices were as sheer walls about them, and they durst not venture either backward or forward

Faces in the Mist

along the gorge. Going cautiously out, and questing as a man quests for very life, or perhaps something dearer, Kenneth discovered a path that a goat might attempt if direly pressed.

"We may manage," he told her, summoning all his cheerfulness. "Will you catch my belt, please, firmly, and hold on with all your might if you slip?"

"To make sure of bringing you down with me," she returned, with something of her old manner. "That were appreciation and gratitude, indeed. Suppose I wear the belt instead of you?"

"Excellent," returned Kenneth, in a flush of admiration. "A woman's wit for ever."

In a trice his belt was off and buckled about her.

"Rather loose," he remarked. "But that will give all the better purchase."

Then, as if to prove he had ideas of his own, he took his handkerchief, which was big and of the best linen, twisted it tightly into the semblance of a rope, tied one end to the belt and the other about his own wrist, she helping to make the knots secure.

"Bound together now," he laughed.

"For better or worse," she returned, with a little thrill.

But there was no time to jest. They began to clamber, his right hand forged ahead to feel the zigzagging of the path, and grip where gripping was possible. Often his clenched fingers had to bear the sudden weight of two, and were cut and ripped as by jagged iron, but ever his cheery word was, "Well done; you're doing splendidly!" and she strove to be worthy of that praise.

But in spite of her best efforts the scraping toes slipped, and more than once she had to shut her mouth hard on a scream. Not the least of their perils was that of being discovered clinging like

Pamela's Valour

limpets to the rock. Were that to happen the end would follow speedily, for the victors would have no mercy.

At last, as with a final gasp of exhausted strength, they scrambled to the hollow top of a rock fifty feet up, and fell there panting.

CHAPTER XXV

FLIGHT AND CONFESSION

It seemed to Pamela she could never move again. Breath and strength were gone together. Her ribs felt as if cracked, her nerves and muscles as if torn up by the roots, her limbs as if paralysed. Kenneth, making light of wounds and fatigue, was steadfastly cheerful.

"I congratulate you," he told her when he was able to speak and she to hear. "You've done magnificently; and in such a storm, too. Jupiter Pluvius, how it pours! It's like a waterspout, and we haven't so much as a mackintosh to turn it aside."

"We seem fated to have bad weather, you and I," she said, gathering her energies in a smile. "The first time you gave me your mackintosh. It would be even more useful now than it was then. But what matters a ducking? I'm too glad to worry over that. Since we have a moment's respite, tell me, are father and mother and Carew safe?"

"Quite safe," he assured her. "Only, of course, deeply concerned and troubled about you. And that reminds me, we must not delay in trying to get back to them. I must find a way out. Please stay here a minute while I look round."

Slipping the handkerchief from his wrist he rose as if meaning to leave her, but immediately she was up beside him, with a hand imploringly on his arm.

"No, no," she cried, her heart very near her throat.

Flight and Confession

"You did that once before in a place wonderfully like this, and you know what happened."

"Ah! but I won't be so stupid this time."

"You weren't stupid then, except in venturing too much," she returned. "You mustn't do it again. Don't be angry with me, but I—can't trust you alone."

The words were bantering, but the voice was pleading, and he could feel the quick tremor of fright in her hand.

"But we must get out of this," he argued.

"Let us try then, together," she said, and held out the dangling end of the handkerchief. In return he submitted his wrist. "There, you are my prisoner once more." She laughed when she had retied the knot.

She felt neither pain nor fatigue now. The sudden terror of losing him, of being left alone in such a place at such a time, overcame all feeling of soreness and weariness. She was ready for any effort, any hazard, so long as she was with him.

Fortunately the climbing grew less perilous, so that they were able to proceed without making their hands do the work of grappling irons and their toes the office of spikes. By-and-by they came upon a sheltered cranny under the ledge of an over-hanging cliff. Into this nook, at Kenneth's request, Pamela crept, tucking her skirts tightly about her. She was out of the rain now, though it still splashed and ran at her feet. But no sooner was she settled than she cried out over her own selfishness, and would have left her place but for Kenneth's absolute refusal to allow her.

"I'm all right," he told her. "Besides, it's necessary I should remain outside. We can talk if you're not too tired, and perhaps you don't mind telling me how you came to be out here. I was surprised when I found you had ventured."

Faces in the Mist

"It was Lord Benbreck's fault," she answered, in some confusion; "that is, partly, and partly mine; but I will tell you another time. Let us talk about other things."

She tried bravely to make conversation, but outwearied Nature was not to be denied. In spite of noise and glare and discomfort, plus an ardent desire to be companionable, an irresistible drowsiness crept upon her; her eyelids grew heavy, and presently her head dropped sideways, leaning on the cold, wet rock. Kenneth waited till she was fast asleep; then, slipping off his coat, he put it about her, and as he did so she moved, nestling like a child to its mother. The coat drawn snugly, he retired a few paces, and leaned against a rock to keep watch—and wait.

The storm fell and died away, and the moon came out, shining fitfully among black, drifting clouds. She went, leaving the stars as sentinels, and still Pamela slept. After a little the darkness paled suddenly, and westward across the desert the light flooded like an overflowing ocean. Then the sun himself, lifting a burning crest, like a king following hard on his heralds, peered over the rim and sent a beam, as in salutation, straight upon the pair at Darel Hamra. Roused by that magic touch, Pamela started into wakefulness and animation.

"Oh! I have been asleep," she cried, blushing rosily in self-reproach, as she got to her feet. "What a shame! And you—why you have actually given me your jacket as a coverlet. Is it that you might catch your death of cold and have an eternal grudge against me?"

"Perhaps you will tell me how many wet jackets it would take to make one valid grudge," he laughed in response. "I hope you are refreshed."

"Very much, and at the same time very angry

Flight and Confession

with you," she answered, smiling and blushing yet more rosily. "Vastly in need of a mirror, too, I guess," she added, running her hand over her loosened hair. "How long have I been asleep?"

"Only a little while," he replied, in gallant defiance of fact.

"And you decided that we mustn't both be caught napping?"

"I felt no need of sleep."

She regarded him doubtfully. "And wasn't tormented by a mad desire to wander off by yourself and go headlong over a cliff. I'd never forgive you if you did. Fancy what would happen if you fell over a precipice and I were captured again!"

"I thought of that."

"And remained on guard. How good of you!" Her eyes shone on him gratefully. "You must be very, very tired after your vigil, and also very cold. Yes, and very hungry, too; and there's no sign of breakfast. Have you any idea where we've got to?"

"Yes, luckily I have."

"And the way out?" She held her breath for the answer.

"I ought to, seeing I have spent months and months of my exiled existence round this very spot. Come, and I'll show you where you are."

He took her hand and, leading her forward a dozen paces, pointed downward.

"The railway!" she cried, thrilling in wild glee.

"The railway. It was to see this I came. There, you have my confession." And the colour mounted in a divine flame over cheek and brow.

"To see this," he repeated, in a tone of astonishment.

"Yes. Everybody talks of it except you; the Pasha in Damascus and—and everyone else who knows anything about it. I was hoping you would bring us out here yourself, but you had to go off

Faces in the Mist

on duty. Then Lord Benbreck suggested a ramble in this direction. I don't think he quite understood what he was doing or why I agreed so willingly, and I didn't enlighten him. Perhaps that was wrong and wicked of me, but anyway that's how it was, and that's why you have had the trouble of rescuing me. You see what your reputation is responsible for," she went on, with a touch of her old manner. "It very nearly cost me my life, to say nothing of all sorts of hardships, and I'm sure poor Lord Benbreck has suffered dreadfully."

"I assure you I am exceedingly sorry my reputation, such as it is, has involved you in all this," he returned.

"It has, though," she rejoined, with an enchanting mixture of banter and diffidence. "And you ought to be very, very penitent. If I hadn't heard so much about the engineering feats of Chisholm Bey, I wouldn't have come out here with anybody—not even with Lord Benbreck. But there, don't worry about apologies. After all, you couldn't help it. When a man's famous he never knows what mischief he may do unconsciously."

"Do you forgive me?" he asked, laughing.

"I'll think of it. There's a tremendous debit balance against you."

"As, for example?"

"Why, for example, the awful fright to my father and mother; the danger and disappointment to Carew, who must have been wild to get at my captors; the jeopardy to Lord Benbreck, and through him to the British peerage. If anything has happened to him I don't know what'll come to pass. The British House of Lords will cave in, I expect. Lastly, there's myself. The damage can only be reckoned by my maid, who will certainly have a fit of the horrors when she sets eyes on me. All that's part of the bill. For

Flight and Confession

the present, however, let us see the railway and find safety."

They found a way down easier and quicker than that by which they ascended. But Pamela was, after all, to see little of the engineering feats she longed so ardently to judge and admire for herself. They had scarcely reached the line when Kenneth, chancing to look at his watch, remarked that the morning train from Damascus was almost due.

"Suppose we stop it," he suggested; "or, better still, go forward and meet it?"

"If you think I'm fit to appear on a train that may possibly have civilised people on board," she returned. "I feel as wild, as unkempt as a mermaid."

"You are lovely," he said with unctiousness, and coloured at his own temerity. She coloured, too, her eyes lighting with a peculiar glow. This was the only direct compliment he had ever paid her, and her heart leaped to it. But that it should come now, when she was dishevelled and in rags! Could anything more aptly prove the strangeness, the ineptitude of man? As if to hide his own confusion and spare hers, Kenneth dropped, Arab fashion, and laid his ear to a rail. At first he heard nothing, but presently there came, vibrating from afar, the low hum of wheels. "It's coming," he announced, looking up. "Yes, beyond doubt it's coming," he repeated, again laying his ear to the rail. "For a wonder it's on time. Let's hurry up."

A short distance to the north the line curved sharply. To this point they hastened, and Kenneth, shading his eyes with his hand, could just make out a thin white streak like a film of cloud against the speckless blue. A minute more and the train itself was visible. He offered his arm; without a word Pamela took it and they went swiftly forward, their hearts beating too wildly for speech. Then, as the train drew near,

Faces in the Mist

Kenneth stood between the rails with outstretched arms, Pamela quivering and trembling beside him. The driver, not recognising who signalled, whistled angrily; but next minute the steam was off and the wheels were screeching to the sudden clutch of the brakes. Before the train stopped, Kenneth's chief was off.

"Cheesholm und Mees Fairhoorst," he cried in joyous greeting. "Ach, Himmel, I am glatt to see you alife. It was reborted to me you were keeled, assassinated by Bedouin robbers, und I came to see—on the engine. Und it made goot time, for I kept saying, 'A leetle more steam, und a leetle more.' Now I am glatt, glatt. Haf the veelains been caught?"

"Some of them," answered Kenneth. "I think we have got the ring-leaders."

"Then Gott peety them, for I will not," said the chief. "The tribes shall haf to bay for this. Yea, verily, they shall bay to the uttermost mark. Mees Fairhoorst," he broke off in sudden concern, "you haf been in the storm."

"All night," said Kenneth, answering for her.

"All night," repeated the Pasha, aghast, "und sooch thunder, und sooch lightning, und sooch rain! The tribes shall bay double. Yea, und tree times. Come, my child, come."

He gallantly gave her his arm, led her to the train, and handed her up as if she were a princess.

CHAPTER XXVI

BENBRECK'S WELCOME

WHILE Kenneth hastily described recent adventures to his chief, Pamela escaped by herself to a compartment furnished Western fashion, with a small mirror. The revelation when she looked into it was a shock of horror. "If some of my New York friends saw me now, whatever would they think?" she reflected. More pertinent still, what did one who actually had seen her thus think? She flushed hotly at the thought that he of all people should have beheld her in this deplorable outcast condition.

"Yet he called you lovely," her heart whispered, with a miser's gloating over the words. Lovely! Could anyone, could Helen herself, be lovely in such a tangled, tattered, beggarly disarray? "Yet he certainly called you lovely," her heart repeated. Was he ironical? Was he merely trying to please her? after the manner of men. She could never forgive him for such an insult—never. To be sure he was tattered and ragged himself. Perhaps that made him sympathetic and a little blind. And why was he ragged and tattered? "Because," answered the small insinuating voice, "because he acted like a hero. Can a man do more than give himself for another? He risked himself gladly for you. Is that irony?"

She began to recall the events of the last forty-eight hours—the sudden paralysing terror of the capture, the anguish of the imprisonment, the breathless dread of the fight, the ecstasy, the leaping excite-

Faces in the Mist

ment of the escape, and then the desperate clambering among rocks, aided, always aided, often bodily lifted, by him. She forgot her dishevelled, forlorn condition in telling herself how brave he was, how chivalrous, how considerate, how delicate. It is significant that in that moment of intense, absorbing emotion she did not once think of Benbreck.

But Benbreck was lying in wait like Fate for the opportunity of restoring himself to her attention. He had returned in the dawn, almost throwing Mrs. Fairhurst into convulsions because he came without Pamela, or indeed, as speedily appeared, any authentic tidings of her. Twice she had been caught away out of his sight, the second time as unexpectedly as the first, and all he could tell on his return was that to the best of his knowledge and belief she was with Chisholm. But if he lacked intelligence he was singularly rich in consolation. For this outrage, he confidently assured Mrs. Fairhurst, the Turk would take vengeance by wiping out the evil tribes that throve on general iniquity around Darel Hamra; or if not, then the British Government would infallibly take vengeance on both Turk and Bedouin.

"I'll see to it myself," he told her, to make assurance doubly sure. "I'll go to the Foreign Office, and there shall be satisfaction—or war." But for once he failed to charm.

"What's the use of war if Pan is lost?" wailed Mrs. Fairhurst, failing to appreciate the honour of an international affair which might mean swathes of dead men. "A thousand wars would not bring her back."

"She'll come back all right," observed Mr. Fairhurst, putting a brave front on his own anxieties. "She's with Chisholm. Having secured her escape he'll manage the rest all right, never you fear." He made the statement as if it were a warrant of safety.

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"Yes," agreed Benbreck, with a wry twist of the mouth, "he's sure to manage the rest." It was a galling idea that she was with Chisholm; but just then he would cheerfully have drunk wormwood if by so doing he could comfort Mrs. Fairhurst.

He was still at his beneficent task when a messenger, prudently despatched by the German chief to give warning, arrived with the tidings that Miss Fairhurst and Chisholm Bey had been picked up and brought in by train.

"What did I tell you, Mrs. Fairhurst?" cried Benbreck, and bolted for the station, outrunning in his zeal even the fleet-footed Carew. There, after due welcome, he proceeded as one enjoying an indubitable right to take possession of Pamela.

"I thank you for bringing Miss Fairhurst safely back, as well on Mr. and Mrs. Fairhurst's behalf as my own," he told Kenneth, with an air of graceful dismissal. But he was not to carry the day in that light and easy fashion.

"Father and mother will, of course, express their gratitude for themselves," said Pamela, with a meaning look at her rescuer.

"You bet," chimed in Carew, "and glad to get the chance. Hullo! here they are."

Mr. Fairhurst came up breathlessly to receive a daughter returned, as it almost seemed, from the grave; and behind him appeared Mrs. Fairhurst, white-faced and shaking, the mere ghost of her old cool, confident self. Pamela ran to her, crying out in joy, and threw fervent arms about her.

Coughing lightly, like one embarrassed by a sight on which he is not meant to look, the German chief delicately drew attention to the crystalline purity and coolness of the morning.

"Ach! Nature is charming, charming," he remarked with the fine air of a lover. "Last night she was

Faces in the Mist

all sound und fury, with mooch fire und rain, angry und roaring. See her now: gentle as a dofe, und smiling, smiling. So she refreshes herself with a storm, then sbreads abroad her asure und bearl, und breathes frankincense und myrrh." He sniffed as one enjoying the fragrance of Eden. "Ach, it is goot to be alife! Joost alife, goot, goot!"

"Good, certainly," agreed Mr. Fairhurst, filling his lungs with balm.

"Und thereby we may read a symbol," pursued the German chief, watching his chance to put in a word with Mrs. Fairhurst. "Everything is symbolic of everything else all through Nature, man und beast und elements. What is a storm? An outbreak, you say. Vairy well, und what is its effect? To clear und stir the atmosphere, to brevent stagnation, you say. Vairy well again. Life is movement, und movement is life. Und after storms comes happiness. I congratulate you, Mrs. Fairhoorst. What says the beautiful boet, William Shakespeare? 'All's well that ends well.' I came in trembling und tribulation, und what is it I behold? Rejoicing, rejoicing. Everybody glatter than everybody else." He beamed expansively upon the entire company.

"It's been a dreadful time, Pasha," returned Mrs. Fairhurst, wiping her eyes.

"True, true, there has been a storm," owned the Pasha, blithely, "several kinds of a storm. My friend, Cheeshohn Bey, has told me. But is it not all over und gone? What is sweeter than sorrow turned to joy? Mees Fairhoorst will look back and smile, saying, 'It was a grand adventure in Darel Hamra with the Bedouins, und the thunder booming, und the lightning blazing away like mad. Ha, ha! As for Cheeshohn Bey, he loafes danger. He ought to haf been keeled many times; but lo und behold, there he is, vary mooch alife.'" He made as though

Benbreck's Welcome

to dig his assistant in the ribs, but in view of the gravity of the occasion checked the spirit of frivolity and remarked: "What he wants now is a new suit of clothes. Ach, yes, adventures are bad for clothes—bad, bad." All at once a shadow was cast from behind, and he swung on his heel.

"Our goot, goot friend Abdullah," he observed with a grin. But his face was irreproachably grave as he bowed in courtly fashion. Abdullah returned the greeting with a solemnity that was almost reverential. "Praise be to Allah!" he said in Arabic, his furtive eyes searching for a cue. "I see you all well after events, which I deplore. Have ye suffered much?"

"Are thieves and robbers consumed with kindness?" answered Kenneth. "Or do they lie in wait to bestow benefits? By dint of fighting we have saved ourselves alive."

Abdullah put the palms of his hands piously together and looked heavenward in horror.

"Oh, the wickedness, the wickedness!" he cried. And then, as though meaning himself to see vengeance executed on the evil-doers: "There shall be punishment for this; the workers of iniquity shall cry aloud in their pain."

"Of a truth there shall be punishment," agreed the Pasha, watching Abdullah curiously. "The great Sultan is full of wrath because the friends of his friends have been maltreated where thy power and authority should have protected them, and I am come to see. How many heads, thinkest thou, will atone for this atrocity?"

Abdullah held his breath a second as if in wonder, then he answered: "How can I tell, except I know what evil deeds have been done?"

"It is thy right; thou shalt know," said the Pasha, with the most obliging air in the world. "And to

Faces in the Mist

that end we will inquire into the whole matter, that we may know the truth."

"The truth," repeated Abdullah, smiling wisely. "Ah! my lord would have a miracle when the time of miracles is past. Who can find out the truth about anything—even about himself? As for me, have I not aided thy friend and mine, Chisholm Bey?"

"Yea, to be sure," returned the Pasha, "and we have much to say concerning the aid thou gavest—thanks to give, and much else."

Abdullah's eyes gleamed expectantly a moment, but clouded again as the Pasha proceeded: "All along the Sacred Railway chiefs and vassals have sworn allegiance to the great Sultan. Thou knowest how the oath has been kept. We must see to it, and thou, Abdullah, as the Sultan's friend and liege, wilt help. Presently we will have a conference in private, that these matters may be judged. Meanwhile, these my friends are weary and in need of rest, hungry and in need of food, thirsty and in need of drink; yea, and as thou seest, some of them are ragged and in need of raiment. Till they be refreshed and re-clothed, grant us thy permission to attend to them."

He bowed again with the same elaborate ceremony, and then, turning to Mrs. Fairhurst, resumed his English. "It is time for breakfast," he said. "Adventures give abbetites. Let us eat. After that we shall see what we shall see."

He led the way, still smiling urbanely, and Abdullah retired, a scowl of hate and disappointment on his lean, brown face. He did not like the Pasha's words; still less did he like the Pasha's oily manner. He knew the perils of oiliness.

CHAPTER XXVII

YET ANOTHER FLIGHT

IMMEDIATELY after breakfast the Pasha accompanied Kenneth to examine the bound and wounded man, brought in under guard, and returned chuckling.

"There will be mooch fun," he announced. "Wait and see. Der goot Abdullah is steeped in crime."

"And expects a reward for the excellence of his vices," remarked Mr. Fairhurst, to whom Kenneth had given a hasty sketch of the man's character and doings.

"Und verily he shall haf it," responded the Pasha, grimly. "Verily he shall haf it. Leaf that to me. But it is a revelation to find Cheesholm Bey so full of guile. He has been too mooch for Abdullah the crafty, too mooch. Und by reason of that what haf we now? Thieves calling each other by their right names: even so. The man who was to get the money but didn't swear furiously Abdullah bedrayed him; und so he is now busy bedraying Abdullah. So der drooth comes out, und joostice gets her own in der end. Nemesis is on der drack. Ha, ha!"

"Doesn't Abdullah want to clear out, Pasha?" asked Carew. "To get away from Nemesis?"

"Badly, vairy badly," answered the Pasha. "He is blanning to clear out, has vairy important things to do somewhere else, und all that. But we know; oh, yes, we onderstand."

He cast a glance of intelligence at Kenneth. "When

Faces in the Mist

der rat is in der cage he finds it not easy to clear out. We loafe der goot Abdullah like a broder und cannot be persuaded to let him out of our sight."

"Think it wouldn't be good for his health if he went away just at present!" laughed Carew.

"Joost so, joost so. We must give him all der attention ourselves. Ach Himmel, but he is well attended. We shall haf a gonference, und Abdullah will be invited to answer many questions concerning many things. Then I will make my rebort to der Governor-General, und der Governor-General will make his rebort, und so on. Und after that Abdullah will find out what a blessant thing it is to go into bartnership with his master der devil. There will be mooch sbort, Mrs. Fairhoorst; wait und see."

But Mrs. Fairhurst had reached the limit of endurance. Even the prospect of seeing evil-doers hoist on their own petard could not reconcile her to the thought of prolonging her stay. She must get off at once or die. She had had enough, and more than enough of picturesque adventures, of deserts and savage, designing men.

But there was yet another and more cogent reason for hastening her departure. Since the rescue she had caught Pamela many times looking at Kenneth in a way that made her heart stand still.

The look might, of course, signify mere gratitude; but it might also signify something else, something that curdled the blood to think of. In this awful thought she forgot her own glaring and manifold grievances. Why, why in the name of all that was dear to ambition could not Pamela be wise? She never looked in the same fashion at Benbreck, though Benbreck was so much better worth regarding with fond appreciation. Yes, Pamela must be got away at once. "It's really too bad," Mrs. Fairhurst

Yet Another Flight

told herself bitterly. "Really too bad that I should be harassed and thwarted; yes, deliberately thwarted in this manner."

The Pasha spoke of trapping. There was too much trapping. She was trapped into an excursion that threatened all manner of disasters. But, thank heaven, her eyes were opened in time, and she would save herself and others, even in spite of themselves. And as she thought of all this hotly, fiercely, what must Pamela do but come begging and wheedling that the journey should be continued.

"Continued?" repeated Mrs. Fairhurst, her patience gone to the last atom. "Continue—what in the world should we continue for?"

"What we started for—at least in part," replied Pamela, demurely. "A glimpse of the holy city."

"A glimpse of the holy rubbish!" retorted Mrs. Fairhurst. "Pam, after what has happened, you might try to have some sense, you really might. Not another step if what you call the holy city was paved with gold and pearls and shone like—the New Jerusalem. I'm amazed at you, Pam; astounded, simply astounded! That's what I am."

"Rube," she told her husband a few minutes later, "would you believe it, in spite of all we've come through on this preposterous excursion, Pam is actually proposing we should go ahead and see Medina, and very likely get ourselves killed! Seems to me she has lost all the sense she ever had. I haven't language to express how I feel about it all."

"Don't you worry trying, Susannah," Mr. Fairhurst returned softly. "I can understand."

"Then if ever in all your life you felt like doing anything in particular for me, do it now, Rube," she pleaded, with an earnestness verging on despair. "Give orders at once to get away back out of this. I'm sick; our lives aren't safe. Besides"—and,

Faces in the Mist

looking things unutterable, she whispered her awful suspicions concerning Pamela in his ear.

The effect was not quite so electric nor so horrifying as she expected. He stared a moment, then pursed his mouth and whistled as one who is surprised but by no means scandalised.

"You don't say," he returned, "you don't say?"

"I do, Rube, I do!" she rejoined, with tragic emphasis of voice and look. "And just think what it would mean—all our plans wrecked, everything ruined. Might as well never have crossed the Atlantic at all. Oh, Rube, I'd simply die if things went wrong!"

"Don't want to have to take you home in a coffin, Susannah," he owned tenderly.

"That's about what you'll have to do, if we don't get out of this quick, Rube. I'm just in terror Lord Benbreck may kick. He has reason."

Mr. Fairhurst lifted his eyebrows. "What reason?" he asked.

"Rube," cried Mrs. Fairhurst, "I have told you. Besides, you might see for yourself. You know why he is with us."

"Yes, I guess so; to unload his debts on to me and secure the necessary funds for the future. Appears to be the way of lords. I'm beginning to see that after their own methods they're pretty cute—oh, yes, pretty cute. Without doing a stroke of work or in general anything useful throughout the whole course of their lives, they manage to have the best share of the good things that are going. What I'm wondering, Susannah, is whether God meant it to be so."

"That's the advantage of being born an aristocrat, Rube," returned his wife, insinuatingly.

"To have the privilege of making others pay for your self-indulgences. By golly, it's so! What amazes me is that the thing goes on so long; that the common people, the real makers of wealth, the real upholders

Yet Another Flight

of a country, stand it. They wouldn't, if they thought things out for themselves. Talk of the docile ass! The four-legged species isn't in it for docility with the two-legged. But some day there'll be the biggest burst-out this old earth has ever seen; then some costly head-gear will be thrown into the melting-pot, I reckon, and certain fine gentlemen taught what it is to work for a living. The drones won't be allowed to go on taking the best of the honey all the time."

Mrs. Fairhurst was much disquieted by these sentiments, and yet more by the tone in which they were uttered. But she was not to be diverted from her purpose.

"Well, dear, we can't reform the world, can we?" she responded, smiling as at the innocence of a child.

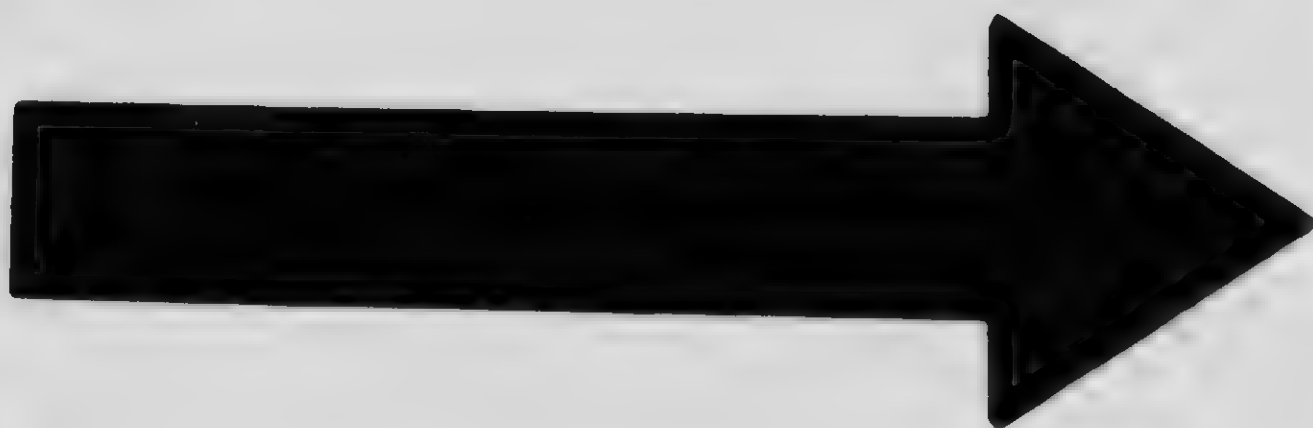
"Don't forget that if the common people began to snatch at crowns and coronets and things, they'd very soon be snatching at our money. I'm not sure they wouldn't begin with it. But anyway, the ancient nobility is an established institution, isn't it? And we've gone to some trouble over Lord Benbreck."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Fairhurst, "we have—a pretty considerable deal of trouble."

"Very well," smiled Mrs. Fairhurst. "Is all our trouble to be thrown away, to go for nothing, just because Pamela forgets her sense? Listen! Again and again, when Lord Benbreck wanted to be nice to her, and show his appreciation and all that, she has behaved as if she wasn't aware of his presence, or resented his attentions, while she's all eyes and ears and smiles for Chisholm. I can't tell you how much I'm upset."

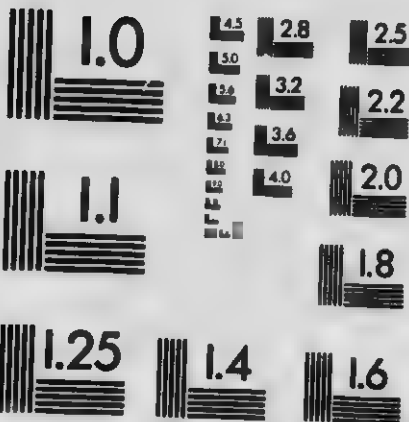
"Knows her own mind, I reckon, Susannah. Besides, so far as I have been able to discover, Chisholm's a mighty good fellow, and you know what she owes to him. Pam wouldn't be ungrateful."

"No, I guess not. But because she's grateful to



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Faces in the Mist

Chisholm, she needn't deliberately neglect Lord Benbreck. Her conduct makes me squirm, and that's a fact."

"But what can I do, Susannah? I can't very well regulate Pam's smiles, or say, 'Though you, probably, owe your life to Chisholm, you must treat him coldly when Lord Benbreck is by.' I can't very well say that. Moreover, we're Chisholm's guests."

"I wish we weren't," cried Mrs. Fairhurst, on a note of irritation. "And what I want is to stop being his guests just as quick as we know how. Let us get away out of this, and things will regulate themselves."

Explicitly she might have said, "Let us get away from the presence and influence of Chisholm. Till that is done nothing can be right or well."

Hot-foot to London was therefore the order, and Mrs. Fairhurst gave it peremptorily. Once in England, she could breathe with some feeling of safety, and be once more what she was meant to be, what she crossed the Atlantic to be, a feminine Alexander going from conquest to conquest. In London, too, Lord Benbreck would recover the glories of his rank, which had been dimmed and condemned among barbaric scenes and hostile, plotting men. Moreover, Pamela would get over her infatuation (if such it were), and appreciate his attention, when she beheld him once more shining among his peers. The glamour of absurd and fantastic adventures would pass, as would also another glamour ten times more absurd, and a thousand times more perilous. In a word, the scales would fall from her eyes, and, like a sensible girl, she would clutch at her glorious opportunity, instead of flinging it away as if she were bewitched.

With a wild uplifting of the heart, and a fierce renewal of energy, Mrs. Fairhurst hustled to be off from scenes and people that were become abhorrent. Benbreck was with her heart and soul. For if she

Yet Another Flight

was impatient, he was sick; if she squirmed, he fumed. Baffled and (as he felt) belittled, insulted in dignity, wounded in *amour propre*, he had many hot fits of revolt. It was all very well for his father to give counsel—to say, "Think what a million sterling would do for us." He had thought till he sweated; till his head swam; endured till his very stomach turned. Only the desperate need of cash enabled him to go on hoping, enduring, striving. But it seemed that at every move he merely played into the hands, he would not say of his rival—that would be honouring the fellow toomuch—but of the enemy he despised.

Was he the tool of destiny? He enticed Pamela out among the rocks and chasms of Darel Hamra, resolved that the great question should be decided between them before returning; and what was the result? That Chisholm in the guise of a hero brought her back. What he witnessed since forced him to agree with Mrs. Fairhurst that the departure could not be too speedily accomplished. In London, in the Highlands, with a free field, he would go ahead and win. "For I've got to have her," he told himself. "The idea of Chisholm stepping in! Good Lord!"

The Pasha excused himself for not accompanying the party to Damascus on the ground that he could not leave his "goot friend Abdullah." "But Cheesholm Bey will go with you," he said, "und is he not better than ten of me?"

"Will he, too, not be wanted for the Abdullah affair, Pasha?" Mrs. Fairhurst inquired, sweetly. "We must not think of taking him away from duty." If she could be rid of Kenneth at once, so much the better.

"Of course," replied the Pasha, "he will be wanted—when he has conducted you safely back to Tamascus. Gott in Himmel, would he bring you to Tarel Hamra

Faces in the Mist

und leaf you in der wilderness? He will see you off. Then he will return und we will see to Abdullah; und when all is over und done, und der mess fixed up, he will rebort to you."

"We will look for the report with interest, Pasha," returned Mrs. Fairhurst, putting the best face on her disappointment.

"Und you will not be disabointed," the Pasha told her cheerfully. "Abdullah is an interesting veelain. He was born in sin und brought up in iniquity, und bractised wickedness all the days of his life. But he was too clever. It does not bay to be too clever. Der brisons are full of men that were too clever. What I say is, look out for Cheesholm Bey."

He glanced at Kenneth, rubbing his hands and chuckling.

"Once ubon a time," he pursued, "Abdullah took me in. He sboke undroothfully und I believed him. Then I cursed und said, 'Wait.' I haf waited. Behold, his sins have found him out! Der day of reckoning has come through Cheesholm Bey."

Again Mrs. Fairhurst smiled benignly. They who are putting ill-fortune and undesirable people bchind them can afford, after all, to be pleasant.

To be sure, there was still the leave-taking at Damascus. Nor did it pass without furtive frowns and smothered snorts of disapproval. Benbreck, indeed, was superb. Mrs. Fairhurst found in him all the old lordly bearing, the haughty indifference, the splendid air of disdain for the man he contemned. "We are parting," his manner seemed to say. "Go your way, you presumptuous interloper! Your little game is at an end."

The conduct of the others, alas, was less pleasing. Forgetting all that had been said and done, Mr. Fairhurst gave Kenneth a cordial invitation to Bruan

Yet Another Flight

when next he visited Scotland. Carew was more vexing still. "We are for ever and ever indebted to you," he declared, "the whole thing has been simply corking."

But, as usual, Pamela offended most of all, if not by actual speech, at any rate by look. Mrs. Fairhurst prayed Benbreck might not see her face as she said "Good-bye" to Chisholm. For herself she drummed impatiently on the carriage window. Would the train never start, never end the agony of fear, suspense and vexation? When it moved she dropped back into the corner of her seat. As the figure of Kenneth, standing bare-headed on the platform, passed from sight, she sighed in relief. Thank heaven, at last, at last!

BOOK III

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

WHAT PAMELA OVERHEARS

THE report, long delayed because of the tardiness of the Turk, reached Bruan at last, informing all concerned that justice had been done. Abdullah lied, smiled and prospered through so many years that knavery came to be his religion; but suddenly the arm so slow to smite, so terrible when it does, shot out and struck.

"Write und tell your friends that Abdullah der joost has got his re-ward," his chief instructed Kenneth. "Say a blessed trangquillity brevails, und we are all as habby as sucking dofes. Ach, mein friend, when Nemesis starts out on der drack der evildoer has a bad time. Say that Tarel Hamra is safer than London, mooch safer, for I was once nearly keeled in der street there."

Kenneth told the tale with alacrity—in his own way. For London he put the pine-screened, fern fringed roads around Bruan, and got in many things in no wise connected with the Sacred Railway or the fate of Abdullah. The report was sent to Pamela, and accompanying it were certain remarks and sentiments meant for her alone. Thus the writer hinted he was beginning to long once more for the breath of the moorland, the scent of the flowering heather.

Faces in the Mist

Perhaps it was to relieve a yearning he durst not express too explicitly that he called poetry to his aid in snatches of "A Song for the Hot Winds":

"Oh for the sound of the burnies
That wimple to the —
For the sight of the browning bracken
On the hillsides waving free!
O for the blue lochs cradled
In the arms of the mountains grey,
That smile as they shadow the drifting clouds
A' the bonnie summer day!"

There was a reference to "blazing sunshine burning through weary hours," to birds without song and flowers without scent. Then it was added—

"I would give all their Southern glory
For one taste of a good salt wind,
Wi' a road owre the bonnie sea before,
And a track o' foam behind."

The last line made the reader thrill wildly. A track of foam behind! A track of foam behind! Could it be, then, he was coming?

Pamela went off with the rhyme to her own room, where she conned it, pored over it like a saint with his missal. She saw the speeding vessel with the track of foam behind, the arched snow at its cutwater, and on deck a certain figure gazing expectantly, wistfully ahead. Her head was humming; she was dizzy and a mist stole upon her eyes, shutting off the vision.

Turning, presently, she looked through an open window over a smiling expanse of hill and valley. Far up there were the cradled lochs mirroring the lazy clouds. Listening, she heard the sound of water, and easily convinced herself it was the gentle voice of burnies wimpling to the sea, or, at any rate, to the great river below. The breath of the moorland came to her with a fond caress. Inhaling its cool fragrance, she thought of the blistering sands and

What Pamela Overhears

the rocks that were hot to the touch, of a blazing sky gleaming upon a pencil line that daringly pierced the wilderness; and there again stood the magic figure, this time in sun-helmet and white jacket, with dominion over the torrid vastes. With an intuition sharpened by experience, she understood the longing for a whiff of the pure, sweet air she now breathed.

Of a sudden a burst of laughter came up from below. It was once more summer, drawing near to the confines of autumn, and men of pleasure, idlers, sportsmen so called, were already talking grouse. Some of them, now guests at Bruan, were strolling through the grounds, intent on merriment, and in the laughter Pamela easily recognised the voice of Benbreck.

It rang with a note of triumph—why, she well knew. Somehow, the knowledge and the laughter made her flush—not in pleasure. The first peal had scarcely died away when another and a louder came up. To a picked and primed audience, it seemed, Benbreck was relating some of his comic experiences in the East, and their noisy appreciation was obviously spurring him on. Unconsciously Pamela leaned forward, hearkening, and for reward heard Kenneth's name mentioned with derision. Surprised and angry, she bent her ear more intently. The reference to Kenneth brought yet another peal of laughter, through which she distinctly heard the words "cool cheek" and "brazen impudence."

She sat up with a flaming face. What was the cheek? What the impudence? And what was he who thus airily entertained scoffing companions with ridicule of another? A hero himself to the best of his ability, a doer of worthy deeds; one who marched breast forward, God helping, wherever duty or chivalry called? Nothing of the sort. On the contrary, he belonged to the gilded parasites—the noble Do Nothings who thrive by the industry and energy of

Faces in the Mist

others. She could never at any time get up enthusiasm for sponges, however long their pedigree, however adorned by jeweller and tailor. Now she loathed them. Her blood surged fiercely as she thought of one far away who did not sponge or seek to mend his fortune in the guise of a lover. He was working, working bravely, acting bravely, making a name for himself, carving out his own fortune, as a man should. Benbreck little guessed the ill effect of his unlucky laugh and airy words of derision.

The company below passed on, gaily jesting and laughing, Benbreck's voice being high over all. As the laughter and the jeering died away, Pamela's pulses slackened, and presently she fell once more into a dreaming reverie, in which a track of foam behind a speeding ship flashed and rippled. Then as the ship drew alongside the quay, a figure, extraordinarily lithe and eager, leaped off, and hastened forward as if to greet someone he had spied from afar. So vivid was the vision, that she rose as though to meet the hastening figure, with a half-suppressed cry of gladness.

In the same moment the door opened and her mother entered, smiling radiantly. Pamela started and drew back, flushing guiltily, like one caught in the commission of a flagrant crime. Mrs. Fairhurst, observing with shrewd, keen eyes, read the omen in her own way. So we interpret signs according to our interests, our desires, or our fears. She beamed approvingly on the confused Pamela.

"Lord Benbreck has just passed your window, hasn't he?" she said knowingly.

"Yes, mother, he has just passed."

"Thought so. Did he see you?"

"No, he didn't see me."

"But you saw him all right. Sly puss! watching unseen. Well, well! You needn't blush quite so

What Pamela Overhears

much over it, dear. Guess it wasn't entirely by chance he came this way. Couldn't help it, I reckon." She turned, shut the door softly, and proceeded. "Dare say he's been looking for you, wondering where you were. So have I. The fact is, Pam, your father and I have been talking things over, and he agrees with me it's about time certain matters were settled, something definite done. I know people are wondering why a certain announcement is so long delayed."

Pamela stood perfectly motionless, gazing at her mother, a thousand wild feelings beating in heart and brain.

"Don't you think with us, Pam?" her mother asked. "Yes," she answered, after a pause. "I think so, too."

"Thought you would," cried Mrs. Fairhurst, gleefully. "And Lord Benbreck really deserves to get off the rack. He's been most devoted."

"Extremely assiduous," agreed Pamela.

"But of course we couldn't expect him to go on for ever."

"No, mother; certainly not."

"And why should he? Why should a certain event be delayed any longer? We used to write in our copy books, 'Procrastination is the thief of time.' It's the thief of a great deal more; it's the thief of many a girl's chances. I think I have talked your father over at last. I must say he kicked—over Lord Benbreck's debts, you know; thought at one time he was going to kick right over the shafts, so to speak. But as I told him, he must make allowance for the ways of the nobility; they've got their own methods of doing things."

"Yes, that's plain."

"Of course. And we've got to consider this, Pam,

Faces in the Mist

that if they didn't want money we who have it could never have a proper look in—couldn't climb, you understand. Just think for a moment what people from our side have done. Most of them were no better than ourselves at the start, and aren't half as rich to-day. Why, your father could buy many of their fine estates over here out of his loose change. Not that I'd boast of that; but as I told him, he can very well afford to set Lord Benbreck and you on your feet, and then think what follows; all that society has to give, from kings and princes down." She paused to mark the full effect of her words.

"Yes, mother, that's so."

"Think of it, Pam, think of it. Glorious! Well, your father wants just a word with you for the final decision. Remember that everything is in your hands. Everything. Why, what are you trembling for? And I declare, you're as white as a ghost."

"I think I'm a little bit frightened, mother, by—the responsibility," Pamela answered, feeling as if she must swoon.

"It's a big, big honour all at once, dear," Mrs. Fairhurst owned, soothingly. "But you mustn't be frightened. There, there, you'll get used to it, like other fortunate girls. Listen! is that the toot of Carew's auto? Been away somewhere by himself—at Kinleath, I guess. Wish he'd let those people alone."

"Why, mother?" asked Pamela, glad of any diversion, any relief.

"Why? What's the use of keeping up an acquaintance we don't want? We really can't go on knowing the Chisholms. They're all right in their way, I reckon—but——"

"I want to see them again, mother."

"What in the name of wonder do you want to see them again for, Pam?"

What Pamela Overhears

" Principally to tell them about Mr. Chisholm. We've seen them only for a minute since our return, and I promised to see them again. If Carew were away in Egypt or Syria, and someone came back who had seen him there as we saw Mr. Chisholm, you'd be glad to have all the news you could get, wouldn't you, mother? "

" Ye—es, perhaps. But if you must go, don't stay long; and, above all, don't encourage them to expect any more invitations here. Bluntly, Pam, we don't want them. Let that be enough. Will you come to your father now? He has a little time to spare, and things might just as well be settled at once."

" Not just yet, mother. Give me a little time to— to think."

" I thought you had had plenty of time to think, Pam; but compose yourself. Only don't keep Lord Benbreck waiting much longer. He's terribly anxious for the final word."

Pamela caught her lip sharply between her teeth; then bent her head and described a figure on the carpet with her toe.

" I won't keep him waiting; he'll have it soon, mother," she said, in a low voice.

Mrs. Fairhurst understood the movement with the toe, the drooping head and the low voice.

" Very well, Pam, remember," she returned, in delight. " I must go now and tell your father."

She moved towards the door, but turned abruptly and embraced Pamela.

" Let me congratulate you," she said, overweening pride in voice and mien. " Let me kiss the future Countess of Dundalloch."

Pamela's response was to throw her arms about her mother's neck and burst into a flood of tears.

CHAPTER II

PAMELA'S DECISION

PAMELA went forth from her mother's presence as in the mazes of a horrid nightmare. She panted for freedom, prayed for power, and yet more for courage to burst the hideous coils that were tightening about her to the destruction of all she held dearest in life. By instinct—for she was incapable of clear purpose—she looked for Carew from a dim feeling that in her distress she could count on his sympathy and aid. In her search she met Callum, and stopped. Since her return the two had held frequent converse together, Pamela telling how Kenneth fared in the strange lands beyond sea, and Callum listening like a devotee, his mouth generally open, as if ears alone were insufficient to take in the delectable tale. As he now returned her greeting, he had the look of one bursting with news too big to be contained.

"Ye'll have heard, Miss Pamela——" he said, jubilantly coming at once to the subject nearest his heart.

"Heard what?" Pamela asked, her pulses giving a start of expectation.

"That he's coming, mem," replied Callum. "That Mr. Kenneth is coming. I thought ye'd have heard."

"No," she returned, her pulses beginning to race; "that is, not definitely. I understood he might come—that was all."

Her voice sounded strange in her own ears, and the

Pamela's Decision

figure of Callum skipped and jigged grotesquely before her swimming vision.

"Well, mem, it's no longer 'might.' He's on the way—ay, and, what's more, he'll soon be here. I was at Kinleath last night, and they told me."

Pamela stood a moment, gazing hard at him, as though to grasp the meaning of his words.

"Are—are they very much excited?" she asked then, rather for the sake of saying something than because the question was relevant.

"Is it 'excited' yer saying, Miss Pamela?" was the response. "Daft, clean daft, that's what they are. Ay, and I'm just as daft as the lave. It's a queer thing this human natir, Miss Pamela—a queer, queer thing. Here's me, an old, done, ramshackle, body, just fit to doiter among my bits of flowers and bushes and things. There's word that Mr. Kenneth is coming home, and, lo and behold you, I'm young again. You may wonder at that. What's he to me or me to him? you ask. Not one drop's blood. But for all that I'm just like a lassie expecting her sweetheart, and by all accounts that's gey and fain, Miss Pamela. Maybe, I ought to be ashamed; but it's God's truth I can hardly go about my work for the liting of my heart, and the whirling of the thoughts that come into my poor old head."

Pamela smiled, trying to smother the distracting whirl of her own thoughts. She envied Callum his privilege of confessing his feelings without shame or hesitation. And as she stood in a fiery tumult, all at once there came the sound of hurrying footsteps, and, turning quickly, she faced Carew.

"Been looking for you, Pam," he cried. "Say! what do you think? Chisholm's coming home!"

"So Callum has just informed me," returned Pamela, striving, not too successfully, to appear cool.

"Callum's got ahead of me, eh?" said Carew, good-

Faces in the Mist

humouredly. "Thought I'd get in first with the news."

"You know the news is true, I suppose?" said Pamela, dizzily.

"Saw his own letter not an hour ago. Fact he's on the ocean now, pretty near this side, too, I reckon, and I tell you they're jumping out of their boots at Kinleath. I'm glad he's coming."

"Have you told Lord Benbreck?"

"Haven't had the chance yet. But I guess you'd better do that. Say! Benbreck will have cold feet over this."

He laughed lightly. Pamela shrank as at the touch of fire, and Callum went his way, his face suddenly dark and fierce, as it always was at the mention of Benbreck.

"He'll come along here first thing," Carew went on. "That is, of course, after seeing his own folk."

"Oh, don't you know?" returned Pamela, her voice quivering. "Haven't you heard? Mother has forbidden us to have anyone from Kinleath. It's tabooed, cut off, so to speak."

"Then I'll up with the red flag," said Carew, cheerfully. "I'm a rebel, you bet. I know she's not exactly gone on the Chisholms. What's her objection to them, anyway?"

"Oh, her objections are various," answered Pamela, flushing hotly. "You may guess some of them. Hush!" she added, at the sound of an approaching footstep. "I believe it's Lord Benbreck looking for me. Please don't say anything about Mr. Chisholm coming home, or about seeing me now. I can't meet him at present."

She slipped noiselessly aside, and next moment had disappeared.

Half an hour later she was holding the fateful talk with her father. She went to him with her heart very near her mouth, but her very dread was an incentive to get the ordeal over.

Pamela's Decision

The interview took place in the library, the two sitting very closely and confidentially together. Mr. Fairhurst broke the ice by explaining that Lord Benbreck had come to him again in a fever of ardency and impatience; and that, subject to her approval, a certain understanding had been reached. The last word, the final decision, he was careful to intimate, lay with her. Pamela trembled and paled as she listened, and he patted her cheek to reassure her.

"I needn't waste words telling you how precious you are to me, Pam," he remarked fondly, "or how much I think of your future. I don't know that you were ever more precious to me than you are now. We value things most, it is said, when we're in danger of losing them. As a general principle that's true, I guess."

She smiled at him with a heroic effort to control her agitated feelings and show the gratitude she felt.

"The milestones are flying behind me with increasing speed," pursued her father, "in that journey for which no return ticket is issued. That makes one think at times of things that needn't be mentioned. Before reaching the end there are still a few matters I'd like to have settled, and one of them—one of the chief of them—is to see you made happy."

"You've always made me happy," she murmured, snuggling closer and slipping her hand into his.

"Always. You don't have to begin now."

"That's nice of you, Pam. Well, if you promise not to be vain over it, I'll confess you were always worth making happy—more or less." He smiled at her tenderly. "Now it seems others want pretty badly to take the task off my hands. But before I consent to part with you, I want to hear from yourself that it's all right. Benbreck has spoken to you again, I reckon?"

Pamela's face was bloodless, and a mist was in her

Faces in the Mist

eyes ; but she answered quite clearly : " Yes, he has spoken to me again."

" And, as the saying goes, is not without hope. Now I want to hear your side. We've always been chums, Pam, so you'll speak quite frankly. Follow the dictates of your heart. In a thing of this sort it's best, I guess. Only, be sure you're right. Other mistakes you might get over without any great trouble or injury ; but a mistake here would be misery."

For the space of half a minute she looked very intently into his face.

" Would you like me to marry Lord Benbreck ? " she asked then, her whole being in suspense for the answer.

" I'm a lover, too, Pam," was the reply, " and perhaps I'd like to keep you entirely to myself—to go on as we've been doing since you can remember anything. But as that would be selfish on my part, I'd like you to marry the man of your own free choice, the man who is worthy of you."

" Is Lord Benbreck ? " She was almost choking with excitement, and the tumult in her ears was deafening ; yet she spoke with an appearance of self-possession, even of lightness.

" That's just what I'm trying to find out," was the answer, " and I thought I'd come to headquarters for information. His professions seem all right. So is his family, as things are reckoned over here. He has a very big social position to offer."

" And it's a compliment, an honour, he should offer that big position to me. But you haven't told me what you think of him yourself."

" You haven't asked me."

" I ask you now. Please tell me."

" Well, I guess he'd be reckoned by most people among the great prizes—big social position, as I have said, long lineage, aristocratic tastes, and all that.

Pamela's Decision

Can't go back to the time, I reckon, when there wasn't a Dundalloch or the forefather of a Dundalloch going round, and pedigree's a mighty big asset over here. Personally, I can't say I'm much gone on antiquity. Been too much in the stress and rush of current events, I guess, to appreciate the historic and sentimental side of things. I've heard people rave over a musmmy. I couldn't do that. Mummies don't impress me much."

"Nor titles, perhaps?" put in Pamela, fearfully.

"I own they don't dazzle me, especially at close quarters, though, of course, I recognise that a title is a mighty good door-handle. It opens very exclusive doors. There's no gainsaying that. Well, it appears there's a title waiting for you, Pam, if you care to have it."

"A title isn't everything, papa."

"That's so, Pam—that's so. Most of us would be of little account if it were. We've got to think, too, of what goes along with the title. It's good to mount, to be up among the privileged and envied few, but it's wise to remember that the higher we go the worse the fall, if by any chance we stumble and come down. A title all mud looks uncommonly bad. I'll say right here that I don't want anything of the sort in my family. Then again, we have this to consider—that ultimately, after all allowance for titles, cash, and other extraneous etceteras, a man must be judged in and for himself, reckoned to be worth not what he *has*, but what he *is*."

Pamela was quivering through and through. Were not these the very doctrines, the very sentiments, she had secretly been preaching to herself with so much cogency and conviction?

"And how does Lord Benbreck stand the test?" she asked, as one whose fate is staked on a word.

"Precisely what I want to discover," her father

Faces in the Mist

replied. "You have had opportunities to judge. Help me out."

Pamela drew in her breath with a shudder—the shudder of one who is suddenly afraid. Her father smiled at her softly as he waited, marking her extreme pallor, wondering a little at her agitation.

"Aren't you going to tell me, Pam?" he said. "Things are conditionally arranged between Lord Benbreck and yourself, aren't they?" he added, on a new note.

"No," she answered, the muscles of her throat so tight and sore she could scarcely articulate. "Nothing is really arranged between us."

Her father sat up straight. "You haven't refused him, have you?"

"No; but I told him he must speak to you. I don't know what he said or what passed between you."

"What passed between us is simply this—that, subject to your approval, or more correctly, perhaps, to your desire, I undertook to attend to certain financial arrangements on your behalf and his. Of course, I was going on the assumption that by doing so I was acting in accordance with your wishes. You look scared, Pam. Is there anything wrong—any doubt in your mind?"

Suddenly the colour blazed in Pamela's face; then as suddenly departed, leaving it deathly white.

"I am afraid there is," she replied, like one in the throes of a violent palpitation; "and—and I don't know how to tell you. Papa, I'm——"

She stopped as though unable to find words for her emotion. In the dead silence that ensued the door opened softly, and Mrs. Fairhurst peered in, curious and beaming.

"Still at it!" she remarked gaily, looking from one to the other.

She noticed that her husband appeared unusually

Pamela's Decision

grave. That was natural. It was natural, too, that there should be tears in Pamela's eyes—tears of happiness, as she instantly guessed. Pamela had evidently confessed her joy, and must needs weep over it. That was a girl's way of taking extraordinary felicity.

"Come in, Susannah," said Mr. Fairhurst, quietly. "Perhaps you can help us out with this thing." Mrs. Fairhurst stepped briskly forward, her features wreathed in a confident smile.

"Doesn't need much helping out, I guess," she observed, as though amused over an infantile puzzle.

"Hope not," responded Mr. Fairhurst. "But Pam doesn't seem quite clear in her own mind."

"Excited, I guess," said Mrs. Fairhurst, indulgently. "This sort of thing doesn't occur in a girl's life every day; not even when she's as lucky as Pam. It's a big, big event, and big events are upsetting, even when they're expected and longed for. In fact," added Mrs. Fairhurst, as though expounding a crucial point of law, "the more they're longed for the more they upset. What's Pam hazy about now?"

"About taking the step you know of, I reckon," replied Mr. Fairhurst.

"Pooh!" said Mrs. Fairhurst, lightly. "As I have already told her, she's gone and allowed herself to get frightened by the responsibility of a great position, and all that. Well, I'm not denying it's a tremendous honour—a tremendous honour. But she'll get used to it all right. And I can tell you this—Lord Benbreck has no haziness, none whatever. I have just seen him, and he's been saying things about you, Pam, that positively made *me* blush. It's a fact. Don't ask me to repeat them, for I won't. It would seem like flattery. I never saw such a lover in my life. Just mooning around, doting and adoring. He'll go lunny if he's kept waiting much longer—he will, for sure. And here you are, hesitating over a chance that

Faces in the Mist

any other girl alive to-day would jump at. Shame, Pam, shame! Pluck up your courage! Make Lord Benbreck and yourself happy, and be done with it."

Pamela had risen to her feet, and was regarding her mother piteously.

"Why," cried Mrs. Fairhurst, alarm and rebuke in voice and eyes, "whatever's the matter with you? One would think from your looks you had just been sentenced to execution."

With a strangled cry, Pamela staggered forward and seized her mother's hands.

"Mother," she cried, a great sob in her voice, "forgive me! I am going to break your heart, to disappoint all your hopes. I cannot marry Lord Benbreck."

Mrs. Fairhurst stood silent and motionless a minute, as one thunderstruck, stunned by a cruel blow.

"Cannot marry Lord Benbreck!" she repeated, like one in a dream. "Cannot marry Lord Benbreck!"

Pamela, gripping the hands she held as in a vice, put her face close to her mother's. "Don't be angry with me, mother," she pleaded. "You're a woman, and can understand. Mother dear, don't try to force me."

"But I will force you," retorted Mrs. Fairhurst, recovering her wits in a sudden overwhelming passion. "Fools must be forced. You shall marry Lord Benbreck! You shall! Do you think we have gone to all this trouble and expense for nothing? Do you think I'm going to be made the laughing-stock of all my friends who expect this thing? You shall marry Lord Benbreck! Do you hear? You shall marry him, or you are no daughter of mine!"

With a stifled cry of anguish, Pamela dropped the hands she held and turned away, her head reeling. But for her father's prompt support, she would have fallen.

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CHAPTER III

ANOTHER THUNDERBOLT

IN the course of a varied and chequered existence, Bruan Castle was shaken by many a tempest, many a deed of violence, but never, perhaps, by such a tempest as raged within its walls that night. Frantic with wrath, frenzied with chagrin, Mrs. Fairhurst appalled even the members of her own family, who expected an outburst of fury. In the end Pamela fled from her, sick and stupefied, to take what counsel and courage were possible of her own tumultuous heart.

¶ For the sake of peace, Mr. Fairhurst advised patience, and even ventured to make excuses. His wife would have none of them. Pamela was a rebel, a traitor, and must be dealt with ruthlessly as such. Mrs. Fairhurst declined to brook the constant and deliberate disobedience, the wanton opposition to her fondest hopes and schemes.

"Pam has got to do this thing," she declared, her eyes gleaming furiously in a livid face, "and the sooner she is brought to her senses the better. You wouldn't send Chisholm away when I wanted you to, and you see what has happened. You realise, of course, that he's at the bottom of the whole trouble?"

"You have hinted before that Pam liked him," returned Mr. Fairhurst. "Do you mean to say that she really cares enough for him to refuse Benbreck?"

"I mean to say that when a girl loses all the sense she ever had, there's no limit to her foolishness," was the response. "Pam has not condescended to take

Faces in the Mist

me into her confidence. Oh, no; her own mother isn't good enough for that. I believe she thinks me blind. But I'll prove to her she's wrong. I saw some time ago how things were going, and warned you. You can't deny that. Pam is fonder of Chisholm than is good for her health—or mine. They were a great deal too much together in Arabia and Damascus, and while Chisholm was round Lord Benbreck was nothing. I'm amazed he stood it. If he wasn't devoted to her he wouldn't. If you had heeded my warning, and sent Chisholm about his business, this mess wouldn't have happened just, just when I thought everything was nicely fixed up. You were ready to see the thing through, weren't you?"

"I was ready to help Pam in the general scheme of happiness as far as I could," was the answer.

"And what could make any girl of sense happier than the magnificent chance that Pam is evidently bent on throwing away? I think I see other American girls doing it! She's behaving like—like an absolute lunatic."

"Well, well, don't be harsh with her," Mr. Fairhurst pleaded. "She may come round all right. It's easy for a girl to get her feelings tangled up in an affair of this kind, I reckon. You were once young yourself, Susannah."

"Never was crazy, I guess," retorted Mrs. Fairhurst. "Was I a fool in marrying you?"

"Hope not, Susannah; hope not. Sized me up and reckoned I'd do."

"Didn't go to work to ruin my own life, anyway. If Pam tried her hardest to spoil her own chances, she couldn't do worse than she's doing. Oh, she makes me sicker than I can tell! And Carew, too, appears to be infected with this Chisholm madness. Never out of Kinleath if he can invent an excuse for being there. Insisted on bringing Mrs. Chisholm and her daughter

Another Thunderbolt

to see me, when I wouldn't go to see them. Wonder they're not ashamed of themselves in openly setting a trap for him. Appears to me we have a pair of fools for our children; and, what's more, they're making pretty considerable fools of us."

"I wouldn't take on so much about it, Susannah. We'll go on holding up our heads all right, I reckon."

"You may, because you're a man and don't feel things; but I can't—I can't," repeated Mrs. Fairhurst, tragically. "Oh, it's too maddening for anything! Label me 'Failure,' and send me home in a cattle-wagon. I'm not fit to look after myself."

"We won't give you up just yet, Susannah," returned Mrs. Fairhurst, encouragingly. "Not just yet. But I allow the complications are a little difficult. There's Benbreck, for instance; what are we going to do about him?"

"Yes, there's Lord Benbreck," agreed Mrs. Fairhurst, bitterly. "Better tell him, I guess, that he's no good and isn't wanted, and may go elsewhere with his title and big position, and all the rest of it. It'll make him feel pretty sour, I guess, and let him see what we are; but it's best to own up at once. Then he'll be free to go to someone else with more sense and appreciation. Oh, I tell you we're having a pretty nauseous draught to swallow." And then of a sudden her fury was rekindled, and she broke out afresh. "Lord Benbreck is not going to be treated badly so long as I am here," she cried vehemently. "Pam has got to do as she's told and stop fooling—got to. She's mad, and must be kept straight and right. It's your duty to see to it, Rube. And Lord Benbreck mustn't be told of her madness, not on any account. We must deal with her privately."

"He'll be coming to me again. What am I to say, Susannah?"

"Say, if you like, that Pam is a little bit flustered

Faces in the Mist

and all that ; say—oh, say anything you like, so long as you don't upset him. Mind, he's not to be upset. Remember what we're here for ; think of all that's at stake, and play your cards accordingly. We're not going to be turned aside or baffled by Pam's freaks—not if you and I have any authority left."

On that judgment Mr. Fairhurst went off to think quietly by himself. He understood his wife's point of view, confessed there was much to be said for it, and had, in fact, been gradually bringing himself to accept it as his own. The exalted destiny planned for Pamela seemed in the abstract absolutely right and proper. Nothing could be too high or good for her. But he had always reasoned on the assumption of her own hearty concurrence. If she shrank or declined the particular glory meant for her, then all was changed.

She nestled too closely in his affections to be coerced or sacrificed on any glittering altar of social ambition. Where her heart was not freely bestowed he certainly would not ask her to bestow her hand—and fortune.

He thought of Benbreck and Chisholm, and found himself contrasting the two—not entirely to the advantage of him who bore a title. There is a nobility, he told himself, not included in the peerage, nor distinguished by titles. Besides, he had all Napoleon's admiration for the fighter, the doer, while in his heart of hearts he found it hard to admire the idler, the mere spender, however exalted in station. But these comparisons and reflections he prudently kept to himself, at any rate for the present. His business meanwhile was to be forbearing, tactful, diplomatic ; to appear at ease and unconscious of the elements that seethed beneath a deceptively smooth surface.

And when the first spasm of her chagrin and passion was spent, his wife aided him brilliantly.

"Mustn't let anger run away with us, Rube," she

Another Thunderbolt

remarked, with one of her old smiles. "That way lies futility. Guess we'll bring things out right after all. I'm mighty glad Lord Benbreck knew nothing of the row; he'd have been up and off if he did. Ignorance saved us there. Pam's just about as sorry as she can be for upsetting me. I'll say that for her."

Pamela was, in fact, as dutiful as the most exacting mother could wish, and to all appearance penitent. In a word, Mrs. Fairhurst was once more all zeal and hope for her heart's desire, when a second bombshell shook Bruan Castle from foundation-stone to turret.

Callum was again the innocent culprit. He had gone down to the highway to catch the rural postman on some private errand of his own, and returned with the breathless speed and wild glee of a boy. As fate would have it, he met Pamela alone by the outer gate, and shouted at sight of her.

"He's come, Miss Pamela, he's come!" he cried, his voice ringing with the rapture that throbbed in his heart. "I was down at the road meeting posty, and saw him."

Pamela put a hand to her side as if to crush down the sudden tumult within.

"Do you mean Mr. Chisholm?" she asked.

"Who else, mem?" responded Callum. "Who else? Not half an hour ago he was gripping that very hand." He held it out as for inspection. "Ay, and nearly made the blood squirt from the finger-tips. He's got a grip, I tell you, for all his hand's as small and bonnie as a leddy's, though a bittie brown with the sun. He was fairly running over with questions, too. 'And how's everybody at the Castle, Callum?' says he, almost with his first breath. 'Never better, Mr. Kenneth,' says I, 'never better.' 'None the worse for their adventures in the East?' says he. 'You know I met the family in Damascus, and took them

Faces in the Mist

over part of our new railway.' 'Oh, yes, I know,' says I. 'Didn't Miss Pamela tell me? Ye'll be coming to see for yourself how they are, Mr. Kenneth?' 'I couldn't well do less than that, could I, Callum?' says he; and there was a look on his face it would have done your heart good to see, mem. Anyway, it did mine good. I never saw him looking finer. He's bonnier than ever, Miss Pamela—bonnier than ever. It's the proud, proud folk they'll be at Kinleath this night."

It seemed to Pamela she had never known excitement till that moment. To hide her commotion, to find relief and commune with herself over this piece of news, she turned away, pretending to smile at Callum's enthusiasm. What she dreaded above all else just then was a meeting with Lord Benbreck, who considered it his duty to be for ever attending her. But luckily she escaped to her own room. There, having shut and locked the door, she sank into a chair, panting and half-fainting. A great terror, a great joy possessed her. What would the next few days bring forth? How would Benbreck behave? Why didn't he go away? Was he blind, or had he no pride? He might spare her this agony. And her mother? She shut her eyes as if to ward off the vision of her mother in this new, this culminating crisis.

Incapable of thought, Pamela felt with excruciating acuteness. The world and all things in it swam as in a mist. A harrowing sense of isolation seized her. She was alone—alone in feeling, alone in aspiration. Nay, worse, she was counted, as she well knew, an unfilial rebel. In the midst of the turmoil she found herself asking passionately, "What's going to happen? Oh, I wonder what will happen?"

And just then there came floating on the still air the sound of a voice raised in song—one of the maids singing at her work. At first the words were not

Another Thunderbolt

distinguishable, but as Pamela listened, she could not tell why, one verse rung out clear and strong :

He's comin' yet, he'll soon be here,
He's comin' yet for a' that;
He's comin' yet, he'll soon be here
That'll take me frae ye a' yet.

How all occasi is contributed to her tumult ! The very laundrymaid over her tub must needs throw fuel on the blazing fire. She almost envied the singer the privilege of that free vent of song. In this mood her own heart began to sing in unison :

He's comin' yet, he'll soon be here,
He's comin' yet for a' that;
He's comin' yet, he'll soon be here
That'll take me——

She pulled up with a gasp, every nerve and fibre thrilling as if on fire.

CHAPTER IV

THE GREAT TRIUMPH

NEXT morning, soon after breakfast, Mrs. Fairhurst interrupted her husband in the midst of his correspondence, her face an epitome of fear and disgust. "Have you heard? Chisholm's back," she informed him, as if announcing some awful calamity.

"Back, eh!" said Mr. Fairhurst, sitting up in interest. "Well, we knew he was coming soon, didn't we?"

"Yes, we knew he was coming soon," Mrs. Fairhurst owned. "But that he should come at this moment, when things are in a bad enough tangle without him, is too exasperating for anything. I suppose the next thing will be a visit from him here."

"We made him promise to come when we parted at Damascus," Mr. Fairhurst reminded her; "and, of course, he'll consider it his duty, more or less, to call. We owed him a good deal in Damascus and elsewhere."

"Yes, a great deal—of trouble," retorted Mrs. Fairhurst. "As to the invitation, if he had any sense he'd see how things stand. Every invitation that's given isn't meant to be accepted. Isn't it about time he understood that he can't go on visiting here?"

Mr. Fairhurst jerked his cigar skyward, as his habit sometimes was in hard spells of thought.

"You mean he's not wanted?" he said. "That's rough; but, granting it is so, how would you propose to deal with the situation, Susannah?"

"That's easy enough," was the prompt reply.

The Great Triumph

"You agree Chisholm's not wanted. If he can't discern that for himself, then manifestly it's our business to enlighten him. If a hint won't do, then in my opinion we'd be perfectly justified in giving him the cold shoulder—in fact, in declining to see him. Things must be brought to a head some time, and the sooner the better, I guess."

"Wouldn't that be insulting a man who has done nothing to deserve insult?" inquired Mr. Fairhurst; "a man, in fact, who deserves every courtesy? I don't like it, Susannah, frankly, I don't like it. After all his attentions to us, I'd hate to treat Chisholm badly. Remember, he went out of his way to treat us well."

"Wish he had kept his good treatment to himself," returned Mrs. Fairhurst, sharply; "it's proved disastrous to us. One thing is plain: we've got to get rid of him once and for ever. When a surgical operation's got to be done—well, it's got to be done, that's all. As to his politeness to us in the East, I dare say he had his own ends in view."

"Has Benbreck no ends in view, do you think, Susannah?" rejoined Mr. Fairhurst, quietly.

"Oh, I suppose we're all selfish at some point," owned Mrs. Fairhurst, in a fine burst of candour. "Lord Benbreck is human, of course. But if he wants something, he's able to offer something in return. He's not a poverty-stricken adventurer."

"I'm not sure everybody would agree with you there, Susannah," responded Mr. Fairhurst, smiling sceptically. "In fact, I rather reckon that's just about what some people would call him. They'd say he wants a father-in-law on whom to unload his debts, and has fixed on me. And I must say he knows how to get through cash. Thought I knew something about spending money myself, but I'm bound to confess I'm a mere amateur beside him. He could

Faces in the Mist

teach me any hour of the day. However, I didn't take too much stock in that. Unless a man wants to have a pretty miserable time of it, he's got to wink at many things in a world that isn't perfect just yet. You brought Benbreck along with first-rate social credentials, and I didn't want to kick over finance. I wouldn't look into that too curiously. But there's one thing I am mighty particular about, and that is Pam's welfare. That's not going to be risked if I can help it. You heard her say she couldn't marry Benbreck."

"Are you going to take as gospel all a girl says when she's too much flustered to know what she's saying?" demanded Mrs. Fairhurst. "Pam was frightened. The great position worked on her nerves and upset her. But I guess she's all right again. All she needs is firm management."

"I don't like the idea of coercion, Susannah," said Mr. Fairhurst, crinkling his brows.

"Who's asking you to like coercion?" his wife retorted. "There's no need of coercion. Pam lost her head a bit, and said things she didn't mean—as her behaviour since then proves. I left her with Lord Benbreck, only a minute ago, as happy as—why, listen, there they are now!"

As she spoke there was a sound of feet on the gravel outside, and a light chattering of voices. Mrs. Fairhurst stepped to the window, looked out a moment in admiration, and then beckoned to her husband.

"Seeing is believing," she remarked joyfully, as he came forward. "Perhaps that will convince you. Talk of lovers! Look at them, Rube, just look at them! I was annoyed with Pam, because it appeared to me she was losing all her sense—throwing it away, as it were. But I guess she has seen her mistake. If you ask me, she is trying hard to show us she has changed her mind and repented."

The Great Triumph

She spoke with the eagerness, the absorption of the monomaniac, the devotee of a single dominating ambition. And, indeed, she was blind to all but the one grand scheme on which all her energies, all her ingenuity were bent, and being blind and obsessed, she often deluded herself into the belief that wishes were realities. Thus she saw in Pamela's desire to be agreeable a genuine repentance, a profound regret for a momentary foolishness. The shining possibility took shape anew, only it would be safest to forbid the visits of a certain intruder.

At present appearances confirmed the faith she would fain have true. Benbreck was in his most gallant, most entertaining mood, and Pamela rewarded his sallies with a ready, rippling laughter that seemed to betoken perfect happiness.

"Listen to her!" remarked Mrs. Fairhurst, in a transport of delight. "What did I tell you, Rube? Cannot marry Lord Benbreck! That sounds like it, doesn't it? My! they make a lovely couple, don't they?"

"Yes," agreed Mr. Fairhurst. "Benbreck's a good-looking fellow, I'll say that, while Pam——"

"Was reckoned the belle of New York," put in his wife, rapturously. "You'd find it hard to beat them in good looks, and that's a fact. And they're as chirpy as cooing doves. All we've got to do now is to be careful, to make things smooth and straight. We must cut off undesirable visitors. Chisholm annoys Lord Benbreck, and doesn't help Pam. Consequently we don't want him."

Almost as she uttered the last words the toot-toot of a motor-horn broke the stillness, and a minute afterwards Carew swept up the Castle front, with the offensive, prohibited Kenneth by his side, and pulled up abreast of Pamela and Benbreck. For a minute Mrs. Fairhurst gazed out as rigidly as if turned to

Faces in the Mist

stone, then a shiver passed through her, a shiver of deep rage.

"Sooner than we expected, eh?" remarked Mr. Fairhurst.

"And brought by Carew," returned his wife, the breath beginning to hiss through her nostrils. "Actually been at Kinleath for him, I guess! What next? I think there's treason in the very air round here. One can't trust anybody, even one's own children."

With fierce intentness she set herself to watch. Though trembling with fear and anger, she was scarcely surprised. Neither was she unprepared. Before hurrying to her husband, she had communicated the news of Kenneth's arrival to Benbreck, and with admirable foresight had secured his co-operation in repelling the common enemy, should he have the presumption to appear. The words, "Cut him, insult him, humiliate him," were not expressly uttered, but the compact was as plain as if a dozen lawyers put their heads together to make it effective. If Chisholm had the effrontery to present himself at Bruan, Benbreck resolved he would not be likely to recall the visit with satisfaction. So much he made clear to Mrs. Fairhurst by the subtle art of nods and looks, and she, comprehending perfectly, beamed in a glowing joy on her champion.

Her eyes were fixed on him now with the unwinking concentration of the gambler over his last chance. She had staked all on him—absolutely all. How would he repay her great trust, her boundless confidence? Might heaven grant him courage to be equal to his opportunity.

She saw Kenneth alight, actually make a flying leap to greet Pamela, and was near enough to mark that Pamela crimsoned to the deepness of a rose. Then he advanced to Benbreck. Mrs. Fairhurst's breathing seemed to cease. For an instant the air

The Great Triumph

was full of whirling particles of fire, and the figures without were dim and unsteady. She put a hand to her bosom as though to quell the riot there and give herself courage. Then with a sharp tremor she began to breathe again, painfully, as if suffocating. But her vision was clear. She saw Chisholm holding out his hand to Benbreck, and Benbreck gazing over it a second in haughty disregard. Then the stiff back bent the fraction of an inch, and with inimitable disdain he swung on his heel. He had kept his compact to the uttermost. It would be impossible to show more contempt or make the affront grosser.

"Say!" cried Mr. Fairhurst, watching beside his wife, "Benbreck has insulted Chisholm openly. That's rough! I must go out and see what's up."

He hastened away, but Mrs. Fairhurst did not move. She might have been stone, so quietly she stood gazing upon the singular, the momentous scene without. The actors in that scene likewise seemed to be petrified—all except Benbreck, who, on turning from Chisholm, advanced a step with fine aristocratic aplomb, and smilingly offered his arm to Pamela. Once before, on a similar occasion, he acted thus. He had triumphed then; his looks indicated he had no doubt about triumphing now. As Pamela did not seem to notice, he bent towards her, still, as was plain, with the intention of escorting her away. To her mother's dismay she drew back, her face aflame with the anger that terrifies. In the same moment Mr. Fairhurst joined the group.

"Anything wrong?" he asked, looking from one to another. "Is—there—some misunderstanding?"

"No, sir, none whatever," Benbreck answered, with an assumption of airiness. "All it means is an exercise on my part of the liberty enjoyed by every man to drop an acquaintance he does not desire to continue."

Faces in the Mist

Pamela shot him one look as of proud thanks; then, with a superb sweep of the head, turned and crossed quickly to Kenneth.

"I cannot tell you how sorry I am," she said, in a voice that fell fatefully on her mother's listening ear. "But please do not take this as *our* welcome. *We* are delighted to see you again at Bruan."

The words came in a great pant, as though wrenched from the bottom of her heart, and in truth she scarcely knew what she said. But if her speech was uncertain, her eyes were full of assurance as they looked for a moment straight into Kenneth's.

"Never mind him," they said, "I am glad. I have been waiting for you. You shall see the punishment he has brought on himself."

For a few seconds there was dead silence; then she looked towards her father, the flaming anger quenched in a radiant smile.

"You were expecting Mr. Chisholm, weren't you, Papa?" she asked, softly.

"Certainly!" was the prompt and emphatic answer. "Certainly I was expecting Mr. Chisholm, and I'm mighty glad to see him. Come right along inside," he added, addressing Kenneth.

"You see?" said Pamela, with a look that made Kenneth's doubting and perturbed heart thrill. "Come!"

Whether unconsciously or by intention, she slipped her arm into his, and they walked off together, leaving Benbreck staring in cold, stony stupefaction.

CHAPTER V

HAIL, AND FAREWELL !

INSIDE, Mrs. Fairhurst sank on a couch by the window, feeling as if the solid world were suddenly melting in mist. It was impossible to misunderstand the meaning of what she had just witnessed. Her great scheme had failed. Benbreck was rejected, ignominiously rejected. And it added to her bitterness that she was consciously guilty of precipitating the catastrophe.

Benbreck, however, was not to take his dismissal without an attempt to set the fatal decision aside. A little later he went to Pamela full of contrition, overflowing with regrets and apologies. She listened patiently till he was done, and then replied with deadly quietness :

"You cannot be sorrier, Lord Benbreck, than I am. Thrice this has happened. In the first instance I, too, did a great wrong because you misled me. It was natural to be biased. You hated Mr. Chisholm."

"And he returned the hate with interest," said Benbreck, clutching at every straw.

"Pardon me if I do not agree with you. On the contrary, I think he showed wonderful forbearance and generosity ; in fact, behaved towards you with the chivalry which always marks the conduct of a gentleman."

Benbreck winced visibly ; but, taking no heed, she proceeded like a judge regardless of everything but the truth :

"Then when I would have made you friends, you

Faces in the Mist

insulted him a second time, and me with him. Of course, I know you apologised in a way, patched the quarrel up. But what was the patching up worth? To-day you repeated the insult, in a worse form. Mr. Chisholm could afford to ignore it, but I couldn't. He is my friend."

In spite of his frantic desire to be reconciled, his resolution to take punishment quietly, Benbreck was piqued.

"Am I to understand, then, that Mr. Chisholm is really more to you than I am?" he asked.

"I do not know that I am under any obligation either to explain or defend my preferences," was the reply. "But since you ask so pointedly, I will tell you that I have the greatest regard and admiration for Mr. Chisholm, and that I like him well enough to protect him from wanton and repeated affronts, if I can."

She made the avowal with a proud lift of the head and a look which said unmistakably, "You have asked your question and got your answer." Benbreck found it flatly incredible.

"But," he protested, his throat all at once parched with fear, "you don't mean what your words seem to imply—you can't. There's a hideous mistake. Let us understand each other."

"Rather let us spare each other's feelings, Lord Benbreck," was the response. "Nothing will be gained by harrowing them, or going back on the past." And then, as if after all womanly pity welled up for the man who had offended her so deeply, "Believe me, I appreciate with all my heart the honour you designed for me. But—well, we really weren't meant for each other. It is better, far better, to recognise that in time. You will find another worthier to wear your honours than I could ever be. Believe that, and let us part as friends."

Hail, and Farewell !

A sudden sickness came upon Benbreck. The fortune of which he was in such dire need, which he was already touching, as it were, with strained fingertips, was suddenly withdrawn. Of the shattering of love in that crucial moment he had never a thought ; but that he should lose the great prize, the heiress who was to rehabilitate him and his just when he was congratulating himself on a sure success, this was an idea too terrible to be entertained. It could not be. It was all a vile dream, a nightmare from which he would arise and shake himself free. But the nightmare became concrete, indisputable fact. At last, with feelings not to be described, he had to own to himself that he was beaten, ousted by—by a Chisholm of Kinleath. That was the crowning horror, the crushing, overwhelming humiliation.

Rankling pride and raging disappointment made immediate flight inevitable. He went as one escaping desperately from falling ruins, flying from sudden disaster, ashamed, too, to look back, yet afraid to look forward. For he knew how his father would take this unspeakable, this ignoble failure.

Mrs. Fairhurst lacked the strength or courage to face the ordeal of witnessing his departure. She shut herself away in an effort to accept with what philosophy was possible the workings of that inscrutable Fate at which she had once laughed in scorn. But Pamela saw him go, with Kenneth by her side—so by a cunningly devised chance it fell out. When the motor taking him away passed out of sight, she sighed as one happily rid of a galling burden. Kenneth looked quickly down at her.

"You suffer all this—for my sake," he said, a thrill of mingled ecstasy and concern in his tone. She moved a little nearer, lifting her face to his.

"For your sake," she answered, in a low voice. "But—but it is not suffering."

Faces in the Mist

He caught her trembling hands and drew her to him.

"May I prove worthy!" he said, bending over her.

"You are—you are," she returned, breathless.

"It is I who must pray that prayer."

For a minute they stood in a beating silence, then, as by a simultaneous impulse, they lifted their eyes hillward.

"Look!" she said, with a quiver of excitement.

"look!"

Following the direction of her gaze, he looked through a gap in the sunlit woods, and beheld a view of the Cairn Dhu Crag, the very spot where he had been over, glittering like gold. There was no need to say of what she was thinking.

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